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SABINA ZEMBRA

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ABINA ZEMBRA

A Novel

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BY

WILLIAM BLACK

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SABINA ZEMBRA

CHAPTER I

SIR ANTHONY

ON a certain Wednesday afternoon in March the billiard-room of the Waldegrave Club, Pall Mall, was the scene of a remarkable occurrence. The Waldegrave, it may be said parenthetically, is held in much veneration by our country cousins as the headquarters of a great political party; there the chiefs of that party are supposed to meet and direct the operations of a general election; thither impecunious candidates look for the sinews of war; and the honour of its membership is understood to be the crowning glory and reward of him who has wooed and won over to the cause a doubtful constituency. All this may be so, or it may not be so, but to the Londoner, and especially to the London diner-out, the Waldegrave is chiefly known for its noble hall and its stately galleries, its excellent cuisine and cellar, its pleasant outlook into Carlton Gardens, and the proportions and decoration of its library, which is far and away the most beautiful room in Europe. As for the more modest apartment in which this remarkable occurrence took place, no visitor is allowed to enter within its door, which may account for the rumour that the proceedings there are not always conducted with a dignity and repose befitting the fame and name of so notable a club. Indeed it has been affirmed (but doubtless by political enemies) that the pool-

players of the Waldegrave, safe in the friendly secrecy of that upper chamber, occasionally, and even frequently, break out into mild revelry; that derisive cheers overwhelm the 'sniggler;' that groans of execration bring the 'fluker' to open shame; and that the timid and nervous player is frightened out of his wits by a gentle remark that he has 'missed the ball!' However, these stories are probably not true; the rancour of party strife is capable of inventing anything; and it would be a pity if the constituencies were to believe that the Waldegrave is anything other than what it really is—that is to say, a great and decorous political institution.

On the afternoon in question, one of the members of the club went up to the billiard-room, opened the door, and went in, greeting pleasantly this one and the other of his acquaintances as he passed them. He was a tall man, of about sixty, handsome and well dressed, fresh-complexioned and white-haired, of debonair look and bland expression, and evidently very well pleased with himself. This was Sir Anthony Zembra, senior member for one of the big manufacturing towns in the north; a man of enormous wealth; a writer of pamphlets on currency, free trade, and kindred questions; an active and industrious politician, who might fairly hope to be invited to join the Government, in a subordinate capacity, one of these days; and socially —well, socially, the most detested man in London. But how could he help that? No one could have explained why he was so detested; he himself did not know it; nay, it would have been impossible for him to grasp the idea. Rich, handsome, bland of manner; his wife a queen of fashion; his dinners quite famous for their excellence; how could he be detested? No, that was the last idea that could have gained admission into Sir Anthony Zembra's head.

'I will take a ball, marker,' he said; for they were just beginning a new game.

'Right, sir.'

The newcomer walked up to the little mahogany box and deposited the shilling claimed by the pool; then he proceeded to get down his cue from its tin case. The marker gave out the balls.

'Red on white—yellow's your player.' The game had begun.

'What ball am I, marker?'

'Blue, Sir Anthony; the ball is in the pocket.'

'Who plays on me?'

'Mr. Herschell,' said the marker, naming the notoriously best player in the club.

And now occurred the incident to which reference has been made.

'Oh, look here, that won't do at all,' exclaimed Sir Anthony. 'Why, I shan't have a chance. That won't do. Herschell, do you play on me? Well, I'm out; I'm not going to give you three lives for nothing.'

'You may withdraw your ball if you like, Sir Anthony,' observed the marker.

'Why, of course I do. Mr. Herschell's too good for me.'

'The blue ball is withdrawn,' the marker said, shutting up the three lives on the board; and then he was about to call the game when Sir Anthony interrupted him.

'Come along, marker, give me that shilling out.'

The marker seemed surprised, but he said quite respectfully, 'No, sir, you can't have the shilling out. You may withdraw your ball, but the shilling is in the pool; you can't have that back.'

'Oh, nonsense!' called out Sir Anthony, with a kind of stormy good nature. 'Nonsense! I haven't played. I'm not in the game. Do you think I'm going to let them play for my money? Come, out with that shilling!'

The marker was helpless; he could only look at the other members in an appealing sort of way. And they looked at each other; for nothing of the kind had happened in the club before—no, nor in any other club, most likely. Then came muttered protests, some angry, some half-ashamed.

'No, no; you can't have the shilling out—forfeited to the pool—you joined in the game when you took a ball—the rule of the game—the marker's quite right—you can't interfere with the pool.'

'Oh, but can't I?' he said, with a good-humoured laugh.

'Do you think I'm going to let you play for my money when I'm not in the game?—you thieves and robbers!'

And therewithal he jauntily went up to the mahogany box and took out the shilling and put it in his pocket. Then he proceeded to replace his cue in its case, and as he walked to the door he shook his forefinger in a waggish manner at the old gentleman whose superior skill had induced him to withdraw from the game.

'You old rascal,' he said playfully, 'you thought you were going to have an easy victim? No, no; not to-day, thank you.'

They made no reply, no protest; the magnificence of the man's meanness, and of his self-complacency, was too appalling; when he had shut the door a kind of awestruck silence fell over the room, and they looked at each other in dumb amazement.

'Green plays on yellow!' the marker called; and this awoke them from their trance; and then, as the game went on, there were questions asked as to the probable dimensions of Sir Anthony Zembra's fortune, and the bigger the figures the greater the disgust. But there was little said, for the marker was within hearing.

Meanwhile, Sir Anthony, suave, radiant, complaisant—and certainly little dreaming that he had just conferred a favour on some eight or ten of his fellow-creatures, in giving them something they could definitely produce as a reason for hating him—Sir Anthony, bland, smiling, and debonair, went down through the hall of the club. Perhaps the nod which he bestowed on his intimates had just a touch of patronage in it; but how could that very well be helped? His life had been all through so prosperous and successful and satisfactory. His first wife had died as soon as she grew middle-aged and plain; his second was good-tempered, except when he wanted the carriage in the afternoon; the *Times* printed his letters in leaded type; his digestion enabled him to eat even a House of Commons' dinner with equanimity; and his constituents believed him when he told lies about previous engagements. The old woman who sweeps the crossing at the corner of St. James's Square curtsied lower to him than to anybody else, though

never a penny had he bestowed on her. In St. James's Street the cabmen had to look out for him, not he for them. He went out into the open thoroughfare with a charming non-chalance, glancing neither to the left nor to the right. And so, eventually, he made his way home, to a big house in Lancaster Gate; and he walked the whole distance, for Lady Zembra had possession of the carriage, and he did not care to spend money on a hansom. Besides, his appearance was much admired (and he knew it) as he strode along Piccadilly and up through the Park.

He let himself in with a latch-key. The house was very quiet, insomuch that a faint murmur coming from the schoolroom was distinctly audible. And as the door of the room was open an inch or two, Sir Anthony thought he might as well pause there and discover whether the governess was doing her duty; for this was one of the afternoons on which nothing but French was allowed to be spoken; and it was Miss Renshaw's business to impose a fine of threepence for any lapse. However, everything seemed going on well. Master Reginald (his father could hear) was reading aloud a composition of his own. It was a description of the character and conduct of a dog belonging to a public-house in the Bayswater Road—'*Un gros chien qui appartient à une maison publique dans le Bayswater Road*,' was the youthful scholar's rendering, and apparently that animal had not found much favour in the eyes of the narrator. But presently other sounds smote the listener's ear. A squabble had arisen somewhere. '*Voyez, voyez, mademoiselle, il a fait pour mon dessin!*' '*Non, non—ce n'était pas moi—ne mentez vous pas—je vous donnerai—vous donnerai—une boite sur l'oreille!*' Sir Anthony thought this an opportune moment. He opened the door and entered, and there was instant silence. But he did not remonstrate or scold; it was enough that Miss Renshaw should see how his mere presence—his presence, without a look or a word—could produce calm.

'Have you looked through to-day's newspapers yet, Miss Renshaw?' said he, as he strolled up to the chimney-piece and lifted therefrom a pass-book labelled on the outside—'Domestic.'

'Yes, Sir Anthony; except those that came this afternoon,' said the patient-looking, gray-faced young woman sitting there.

And of these desultory paragraphs that he was now scanning with much complacent interest, who could guess at the authorship? Perhaps the patient-eyed young person who had that morning carefully clipped them out of the various journals, and pasted them in the pass-book, had also herself inspired them, or even written them out, for the information of provincial editors? At all events, they showed a remarkable familiarity with the comings and goings of the Zembra family, and also a kind of pathetic assumption that these, and the smallest details about them, must be of keen interest to the British public. Here are some of them:

'Lady Zembra and Miss Florence Zembra will shortly leave Lancaster Gate on a visit to Lord and Lady Petersfield at their beautiful place near Marlow.'

'At the marriage of Miss Emily Vere and Colonel Langley last week, the costume of Master Reginald Zembra, who was dressed as a page of the time of Henry VIII., was much admired. The design of the costume, we understand, was presented to Lady Zembra by a distinguished Academician.'

'The Chapel Royal, St. James's, was on Sunday last crowded to excess to hear a sermon by the Bishop of Truro. Lady Zembra and her daughters were among the congregation.'

'At the Drawing-Room held by the Princess of Wales on Thursday, no costume was more remarked and admired than that of Lady Zembra. Her ladyship wore a train from the shoulder of crimson Lyons velvet, lined with pink merveilleux and trimmed with clusters of pink and crimson ostrich feathers, tied with ribbons of the same colour. Her bodice was of pink merv, over a petticoat of the same material, draped with embroidered *crêpe de Chine*, and finished at the bottom with handsome chenille fringe.'

'Sir Anthony and Lady Zembra and the Misses Florence and Gertrude Zembra were present at the lecture given by Dr. Felhurst on Wednesday at Princes Hall, Picca-

dilly. Her ladyship formed quite a distinct figure among the assembly, although merely unostentatiously occupying a seat with her husband and daughters in the body of the hall.'

But all these were as nothing to the description of a children's fancy-dress ball given the week before by a sister-in-law of Sir Anthony's, at which all the Zembra family (except one, whose acquaintance we shall make by and by) appeared to have been present; and very pretty and nice were the things which the faithful chronicler had to say about every one of them. It must have been a gay scene, according to this flattering account; every one looked at his or her best; the costumes were charming; Lady Zembra was especially admired as Marie Antoinette; and Sir Anthony Zembra, as a courtier of the time of George II., was a most picturesque and striking figure. It was a great success in short; and never had the ballroom at the Red House, Campden Hill, presented so beautiful a sight as when the children were ranged in two long rows to dance 'Sir Roger de Coverley.'

Well, Sir Anthony was thus pleasantly engaged in studying the social impression produced by the various members of his family, when he was somewhat rudely interrupted. There was an unusual noise outside. Then the doors were flung wide open, and there entered hurriedly a tall young lady, who was very pale, but had sufficient firmness in the look of her clear-cut and beautiful face.

'Miss Renshaw,' said she quickly, 'will you take the children upstairs? I want this room. Take them to the night nursery.'

'What's this, now?' Sir Anthony said, at once startled and angry at the sudden interruption.

'There's a man hurt,' his daughter answered him quietly; but her fingers were quick enough in removing the things that lay strewn on a couch there. 'They're bringing him in.'

'What?' he exclaimed again, and still more angrily; but there was a shuffling of footsteps outside, and the immediate answer was the appearance of a number of men, who were slowly and with difficulty carrying an apparently inanimate body along the passage.

'Sabina, what is this? who is this?'

'I don't know, papa.'

She was busy with many things.

'Then what do you mean by bringing him in here? God bless my soul, what are you about? Send him to a hospital! I say he must go to a hospital. Here, my men, what are you doing? Who told you to bring the man in here? He must go to the hospital——'

'The young lady, sir,' one of the men said.

'Sabina, what is this?' her father again angrily demanded. 'I will have none of your Whitechapel nonsense here. Are you going to turn the house into a public shambles?'

But Sabina had made her preparations during these few seconds. She caught her father's arm for a moment with a gesture of entreaty.

'Papa, I cannot send him to a hospital. This is all my doing. I am to blame for the accident—and—and there is no time to be lost—why, common humanity——' She turned to the footman, who was standing helplessly by, 'Willis, run downstairs and fetch me a basin of water and a sponge and some cloths; and send for Doctor Hungerford—no, Mr. Hungerford, I mean—the son—and tell him to come at once. And you—yes, bring him in now—but gently—gently—the head a little higher up—yes, that will do'—and when they had got him laid on the couch, she, with her own fingers, and swiftly and dexterously too, undid his necktie, and removed his collar, and opened his waistcoat: it was clear to the most ignorant of the bystanders that this young lady knew very well what she was about.

But as for Sir Anthony? Well, Sir Anthony stood looking on for a second or two very much exasperated. But what could he do? He could not summon a policeman and have the whole pack of them thrust into the street; it was his own daughter who had had the man brought in; and, moreover, she said she was responsible for the accident; and it would not look well to quarrel with her before these people. He wished the wounded man was at Jericho; but he did not want to have these rude folk stare at him for what they would doubtless consider his inhumanity. But

he was very angry with his daughter; and then again, he did not like looking at a head and neck that were bedabbled with blood; and the doctor would have more unpleasant business when he arrived; so, on the whole, Sir Anthony thought he might as well retire from the scene, only he was growling and grumbling to himself as he passed upstairs about the midsummer madness of young women who nowadays went out and got themselves trained as nurses at the East London Hospital.

On the writing-desk of his study there was lying a pass-book labelled outside 'Political;' and apparently his private secretary had done for him what the governess did for Lady Zembra and the family. As he glanced over these paragraphs—'Sir Anthony Zembra, we understand, has consented to take the chair at the next meeting of the Statistical Society'—'Sir Anthony Zembra has given notice that on Thursday next he will ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department,' etc.—'Sir Anthony Zembra was present last evening at a dinner given at the official residence of the Prime Minister in Downing Street'—'We understand that it is the intention of Sir Anthony Zembra's constituency to entertain him at a public banquet in May next'—'The remarkable speech on the Land Question which Sir Anthony Zembra delivered in the House of Commons last week is, we understand, to be issued in the form of a pamphlet'——as he read these and many similar paragraphs, Sir Anthony's brow cleared, and his face resumed its ordinary pleasant and complacent expression, for he was glad to have his merits recognised, and he rather liked to contemplate himself in the mirror of the public press.

CHAPTER II

SABIE

SABINA ZEMBRA—Sabie, her intimate friends called her; and they seemed rather proud of displaying this familiarity; indeed, many of the women-folk down Kensington way, if you mentioned the name of Miss Zembra, would say, with a kind of air of distinction, 'Oh, do you mean Sabie?' as if Sabie belonged to them and to them alone—— Sabina Zembra was a tall young woman and fair; of upright carriage and well-poised neck; with a clear, pale complexion, light brown eyes that were soft and benignant, and light brown hair that burned gold in the sun. She was twenty-five, though a dimple in her cheek when she laughed made her look younger, and hinted that she was light-hearted enough; on the other hand, her ordinary expression was of an almost maternal gentleness and generosity. The blandness that in her father was begotten of self-sufficiency, became in her the blandness of grave goodwill; she looked as if kindness was a natural instinct with her; as if she liked seeing the people around her being made happy. But even this cannot wholly explain the extraordinary affection that women seemed to have for this woman; they would cling around her when she entered a room and pet her with pretty names; and would send her flowers on any birthday or other excuse; and would treasure her letters, and show them, and say with a touch of pride: 'Oh, Sabie has just been writing; isn't she the dearest and sweetest girl in the world?' . 'I hope Sabie will never marry,' was the constant cry of her chief companion and friend (who, poor lass, had not much in the way of pretty looks to boast

of). 'Just think what her goodness, and her beauty, and her loving disposition mean to so many people; and think of her going and throwing all that away on a man!' Of course the men professed to laugh at this widespread and ridiculous infatuation; and declared that Miss Zembra was a woman's woman, and nothing more; but at the same time it was observed, on the rare occasions on which Miss Zembra was to be found at an evening party, that these hostile critics were not nearly so careless of her society as in common consistency they ought to have been.

Sabina did not live with her father. On a certain important occasion Sir Anthony had taken her to task and spoken his mind clearly.

'Understand me once for all, Sabina,' he observed in a more than ordinarily sententious way. 'I am not in the habit of wasting words. What I say I mean to be final. Now, while you were merely busying yourself about Industrial Homes and Training Ships, and things of that kind, I did not object; no, nor did I mind your visiting this or that poor family, where you knew the circumstances, and knew there was no infection. But this new fad is quite different. What will happen after you come out of the hospital? You are not going in for six months' training for nothing.'

'Papa,' she broke in, 'I must do something—you don't know how dreadful idleness is.'

'I know that I don't hear your sisters complain,' he retorted. 'They seem to have enough to fill the time.'

'Yes, but they care for quite different things,' she said; and then she added, with the slightest of demure smiles hovering about her mouth, 'besides, they're ashamed of me. Mamma says I'm a dowdy; and it's quite true. I don't care for fine dresses, and driving in the Park. And then, you see, papa, I shouldn't mind playing the part of Cinderella—I shouldn't mind it at all, for Cinderella had plenty to do and knew she was of some use; but I know you wouldn't like that. You wouldn't like me to become one of the maids and sweep the kitchen.'

'Sabina, this is not a joking matter,' Sir Anthony observed shortly. 'Let us return to common sense. When

you leave the East London Hospital a trained nurse, what then? I know very well. You will be more than ever in the slums; you will be for ever in the slums; and coming and going between them and this house. Well, now, that I cannot permit. It would not be right and just to the other members of my family to subject them to such a continual risk of infection. It is not to be thought of.'

'Then do you want me to clear out, papa?' she said frankly.

'Yes, if you will persist in this folly.'

Well, she was a little bit startled, for a girl does not like being turned out of her father's house. On the other hand, her relations with her stepmother, Lady Zembra, and her half-sisters, Florence and Gertrude, had never been of the most satisfactory kind; not that they quarrelled, but that their modes of life and opinions and aims were so entirely different. So the ugly duckling was about to fly away.

'Of course,' continued Sir Anthony, 'the whole thing is foolish from the beginning. It is simply ludicrous for a young woman of your education and position to turn herself into a hospital nurse, when you can get dozens of women, of more hardened nerve, who could do the work ever so much better. But we've argued out that question before. I suppose you don't intend to change your mind?'

Surely his tone was unnecessarily hard, considering that he was turning her out of the house.

'Papa,' she said, 'I—I think I am doing what is right; but—but you might make it a little easier for me. It won't be holiday work.'

'If it is not the greatest happiness of the greatest number,' Sir Anthony continued calmly, 'it is at least the safety of the greatest number that I have to consider. And I have thought the matter over. I am prepared to allow you £300 a year; that is ample maintenance, for you don't spend much on yourself. I have no doubt you will easily find some quiet respectable family, where there are no children to be put in danger, who will receive you as a boarder, if go you must——'

A sudden, happy light leapt to her eyes—those eyes in which 'her thoughts lay clear, as pebbles in a brook.'

It had occurred to her that she could confer a kindness! Even in being thrust forth from her father's house, her first thought was that there was a chance of doing a friendly turn to certain folk she knew.

'The Wygrams, papa,' she said eagerly. 'Do you think they would take me? You know they are not very well off; Mr. Wygram never succeeds in any of the competitions now; and this might be a little something, if they were not offended. Oh, I know they would take me. Why, Janie spends half her time with me, now; I should be quite at home there!'

'That will be for yourself to decide,' said Sir Anthony.

And so it was that Sabina went to serve her six months at the East London Hospital. It was not at all romantic work. Occasionally, of course, she had her moments of exaltation; in crossing from the nurses' dormitory, in the strange silence and darkness of a winter morning, and looking up to the vast, immeasurable skies, with the stars throbbing palely and distant, she would sometimes repeat to herself, as with a kind of ineffable longing—

Break up the heavens, O Lord! and far
Thro' all yon starlight keen,
Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star,
In raiment white and clean.

But there was little time for self-communing during the continuous labour of the long day; nor was she much given to pitying herself in any circumstances; it was the suffering of others that moved her, and here there was plenty of that, only too obvious, all around her. Moreover, she was a particularly healthy young woman; and she could bear fatigue better than any of her sister non-professionals, although when they got away to supper about half-past eight or nine, and all of them pretty well fagged out with the day's work, they used to joke her about her sleepy disposition. It was rumoured, moreover, that one or two of the medical students who came about had cast a favouring glance on this pretty, tall, benignant-eyed nurse, who looked so neat and smart in her belted gown and apron and cap, and that they paid a good deal more attention to her than to the

patient whose condition she had to report to the doctor. But Sabie was impervious to all that kind of thing. It was only when she was with the other nurses at night that the dimple in her cheek appeared, and that she showed herself —as long as her eyes would keep open—blithe and friendly and merry-hearted. Perhaps she was only a woman's woman, after all.

The long period of probation over, Sabina went to live with the Wygrams, a family who by dint of sore pinching still managed to occupy an old-fashioned house in Kensington Square that was endeared to them by its association with other and better days. Mr. Wygram had been at one time an architect in a fair way of business, and may have saved a little money then; but the capable partner in the firm died; things went badly somehow; and now the old gentleman, who was as industrious as ever, kept working away at competitive drawings, each time more and more confident that he was about to carry off the prize, and never doing so, but sometimes securing a few pounds by way of compensation. However, old Mr. and Mrs. Wygram were great favourites in the artist world of London; and very distinguished people, indeed, might be found together in the scantily-furnished and rather melancholy drawing-room —at an evening party, that is to say, with tea and darkly suspicious sherry and cake to crown the festivities. And what joy filled the heart of their only daughter, Janie, when she learned that her beloved Sabina was coming to live with them! Now there would be no risk of their chance evenings being dull; now there would be attraction and entertainment enough for all the world; and she would be accounted somebody among the young men—for that she could secure them, if she chose, an introduction to Sabie; and she would take off Sabie's cloak when she came in, and get tea for her, and sit by her with their arms intertwined, and have her all to herself. In short, the arrangement came to work very well all round. The sum paid by Sabina for her board and lodging (though this was a covert transaction) was a certain addition to the finances of the establishment; Mrs. Wygram could be her chaperon when there was need; and Janie was her constant companion

when she 'went about doing good.' For that was her occupation in life—as many a poor family down in Chelsea knew; and it came natural to her; and she was as busy and as content as the day was long. Then they had quiet evenings in the old-fashioned drawing-room; and the plain-featured, wistful-eyed Janie played very well; nor was she vexed when she looked round and found that her poor tired Sabie (who was very unconscionable in this respect) had dropped into a little snooze; and sometimes they had a game at whist, too; and sometimes a few young people would drop in, and they would have a pretence of supper, and a bit of a carpet dance. But always these young people —and especially the young men—treated Sabina with a certain deference. It was not that she was in any way socially their superior, for that was not the case; the Wygrams had a very excellent circle of friends and acquaintances. It was rather something in her manner that distinguished her from them. One would almost have taken her for a young and gentle-eyed matron looking on—not without sympathy and pleasure—at the amusements of those boys and girls. She enjoyed their merriment as much as they did; and her laugh was ready and quite youthful and joyous when anything ridiculous happened; but ordinarily there was a kind of serious sweetness and grave kindliness in her eyes that seemed to keep her a little bit apart. She preferred to be a spectator—but surely a friendly one.

Of course she occasionally went up to see the family at Lancaster Gate, when she could solemnly assure them she had been near no infectious case; and it was on one of those visits that there occurred the unfortunate accident already referred to. She had chosen a Wednesday afternoon, knowing that her father would be early home from the House of Commons; but when she got to Lancaster Gate she found he had not arrived; Lady Zembra and Florence and Gertrude were out driving; the children were busy in the schoolroom. The only living thing to welcome her was the little spaniel Busy—an old friend and ally of hers; and it occurred to her that, to beguile the tedium of waiting, she might as well take the dog for a bit of a run along the Bayswater Road and back. He was nothing

loth, it may be guessed; and so she opened the door and they went down the steps and made for the front pavement.

What next occurred may take some minutes to tell, but it seemed to her to happen all in one wild second.

'Now come here, Busy, you keep close to me,' she had said on leaving the house; for she knew the habits of the spaniel kind, and that this one delighted in nothing so much as scampering about in the open thoroughfare—amid cabs and omnibuses and carriages—and always with his nose down as if he expected to flush a pheasant in the middle of the Bayswater Road. Busy paid heed to his mistress so long as she spoke to him; the moment they had reached the pavement he was off—careless of anything that might be coming along. She angrily called to him to come back—he turned in his scamper, but still with his nose down—and, alas! at the same instant she knew, rather than saw, that some one on a bicycle, approaching at an alarming speed, was almost on the dog.

'Look out! Take care!' she cried.

Now, no doubt the bicyclist had seen the little spaniel; and it is also possible that Busy might have got out of harm's way unaided; but at all events her sudden cry seemed to startle this young fellow, who was coming along at such a rate, and probably from gallantry as much as anything else he swerved sharply from his course, to make quite sure of missing the dog. Unhappily, at this precise spot there was a little heap of gravel, used for scattering over the wooden pavement, lying by the roadway; and apparently the bicycle caught on some of the pebbles; the next thing she saw was some terrible object hurling through the air and striking heavily against the kerbstone, where it lay motionless. The blood forsook her face, but her courage was firm enough; she was at his side in a moment, trying to raise his head; and then a few bystanders came hurrying up, and she besought them to carry him into her father's house. White as her face was, she seemed calm and collected; there was an air of authority about her; they did not even suggest the hospital. Nor, it must be confessed, did she pay much heed to her father's

remonstrances; her hands were full of work—work that she knew; moreover, Sir Anthony almost immediately retired, grumbling. She was left alone to deal with the wounded man, a maid assisting her, for the footman Willis had rushed off to summon the surgeon.

'Pore young gentleman!—pore young gentleman!' the maid kept saying; and was rather inclined to look on in a feebly commiserating attitude; but her pale-lipped young mistress had no time for mere pity.

'Catherine, get some calico—quick; and cut it into strips, and put them into cold water—look alive!'

For there was a bad scalp-wound on the side of the young man's head, and she had to stanch the blood, and thereafter bind the cold wet bandages round it. He lay in a heavy stupor, only that once he murmured the words 'cherry blossom,' and, busy as she was, it seemed pathetic to her that he should 'babble o' green fields.' And then, when she had bandaged his head, she passed her hands lightly over his neck, and back, and shoulders, and pretty well satisfied herself that there was no serious fracture or dislocation: nevertheless she was anxious that the surgeon should appear forthwith.

She was moistening her patient's lips with cold water when he drew a long breath and slowly opened his eyes. He looked at her with a kind of mild wonder, and then at the room around him; then he seemed to recollect.

'That was a nasty one,' he managed to say. 'Did I hurt the dog?'

'Oh no, you did not,' Sabina said quickly. 'Pray don't think of that. I am so sorry. It was all my fault. I should not have called to you—I am so sorry.'

'Oh, don't trouble about me,' he said, with a faint kind of smile—for the shock and loss of blood had weakened him. 'This isn't my first cropper. There are no bones broken, I suppose——'

'I think not—I think not,' she said eagerly. 'And there will be a surgeon here directly.'

'But whose house is this?' he asked—it was all that he dared to ask.

'Sir Anthony Zembra's,' Sabina answered, and she added

without embarrassment: 'I am his daughter. It was my little dog that made the mischief—or rather, I did myself. I do hope you are not seriously hurt.'

'Hurt? No, no—don't you bother. I shall be all right,' he said.

He was a fairly good-looking young fellow of some six or seven and twenty, with clear blue eyes, curly but short-cropped hair of a reddish yellow, and a healthy pink and white complexion that had got a wash of sun-tan over it. Clearly he had lived much in the open air; and his frame seemed wiry and vigorous, with not an ounce of spare fat on it anywhere. As for guessing at his profession or calling or social status, that was not easy, seeing that he was clad in a bicycling suit; but his manner was well enough; and he seemed good-natured.

Suddenly he uttered a little involuntary exclamation, and bit his under-lip.

'What is it?' she said instantly.

'My knee—and I hardly moved it—oh, thunder!'

The pain in his face was obvious; and he was about to make some effort to raise himself, when she caught him, and caught him firmly.

'No, no; you must not move on any account—it may be serious—you must lie perfectly still till the doctor comes.'

'Yes, but when is he coming?' he said, with a touch of impatience. 'If I have broken my leg, I want to know. You don't understand what that would mean to me.'

'You have not broken your leg,' said she calmly, 'but you may have injured your knee.' And then she added, without any false shame or hesitation, 'If you like, I will see what harm is done and tell you. I know about these things; I have been in a hospital. Or if you would rather wait, I am sure the doctor will be here in a few minutes.'

'Oh, of course, I will wait—I could not think of troubling you,' he said instantly.

'And in the meantime I will make a splint,' said she, 'just in case it should be necessary. Catherine, run and get me some cotton wool.'

She went to the table, tore the cover off one of the

children's drawing-books, and cut a strip of the thick pasteboard about three inches wide, and over a dozen long; and she was in the act of swathing the improvised splint in cotton wool when the young surgeon arrived. Everything she had done he approved of; but he was not surprised; he was well aware of Miss Zembra's qualifications. Then came the examination of the knee; and that was simple enough, for he had merely to unbuckle the knee-band of the knickerbockers; but the next moment he had grown grave. Sabina had withdrawn a step or two; her assistance was not needed.

'What is it, doctor?' the young man said, noticing that look.

'Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you that you've dislocated your knee-cap, and there's a bad bruise beside. Miss Zembra, I haven't brought anything with me—your man met me in the street——'

Sabina came forward.

'Here is a kind of a splint,' she said, 'and I think there's enough calico here for a figure-of-eight bandage—if that will do in the meantime——'

'In the meantime that will do excellently, until I run home and get some things.'

'But, doctor,' the young man on the couch said, and he was rather pale now, partly from loss of blood, no doubt, but also partly from anxiety, 'what does all this mean? Is it really so bad? You don't mean that I'm to be laid up with a splint? Why, how soon—how soon, now, shall I be all right again? Not long, surely!'

'I don't wish to alarm you,' the surgeon said in reply, 'but I ought to warn you that it is a rather serious case, and that the greatest care will be wanted. Even then it may be months before you can put your foot to the ground.'

'God bless me, you don't know what you're saying!' the young man cried faintly, and very white his face was now.

'I'm afraid I do,' the surgeon said quietly.

The other remained silent for a second or two; then he said, with a kind of forced resignation, 'When can I be taken to my own rooms?'

The doctor turned to Sabina.

'It is a serious case,' said he, 'I would not advise his removal, if your people would not mind letting him have the use of this room, for a few days even.'

'Oh, but they must; of course they will,' Sabina exclaimed eagerly. 'Oh, you don't know, doctor; it was all my fault that the accident happened; I am more grieved about it than I can say; I cannot even think of it; and what we can do we must do; but how can I ever atone for such an injury?'

'The young lady had nothing to do with it,' said the maimed man; but he had to hold his breath now, for the surgeon was about to put his knee in the splint.

By and by, when the doctor was giving a few parting directions to Sabina (who had already installed herself as nurse, the maid Catherine assisting), and promising to be back shortly, the young man on the couch called to him in rather a faint voice:

'Doctor!'

'Yes?'

'I wish you would do me a favour, will you?'

'Certainly.'

'When you are out, will you go to a telegraph-office and wire to the Duke—the Duke of Exminster—that I shan't be able to ride Cherry Blossom for him in the Grand National? It's hard luck, it is. Twenty times have I dreamt of lifting the old horse over Valentine's Brook. Don't forget—the Duke of Exminster—he's at Helmsley just now. Well, it's hard luck; I knew the horse. Nobody else can do anything with him but myself. I could see us over the ditch and rail fence near the bridge and fairly in the line for home. Poor old Cherry Blossom—it's very hard luck.'

'And from whom shall I telegraph?' the doctor said gently.

'Oh, my name, you mean? Fred Foster, Bury Street; the Duke knows.'

Sabina had left the room for a minute or two, and so remained undeceived as to the mistake she had made about his having 'babbled o' green fields.' But that was not

of much account, perhaps. What was of more account, at least to one very tender heart, was that poor Janie Wygram was now to be deprived for many a long day to come of the society and companionship of her beloved Sabie.

CHAPTER III

WALTER LINDSAY

IT is rather a sorry thing in these times to have to speak of a man who is in love; for in the eyes of most people—especially of the young men of the day—he seems to be considered a sentimental jackass; unless, indeed, the woman he is in love with should happen to be a married woman; and then the whole situation becomes intelligible, and even something to be mildly envied. However, Walter Lindsay was in love, and very much in love; and not with a married woman; but with Sabina Zembra.

'Poor fellow,' Janie Wygram would say to her mother; 'I do believe he is the most wretched man in this country; and yet you would think he had everything that a human being could wish for. Good-looking—well, I call him most distinguished-looking and handsome; with pleasant manners, a favourite everywhere, every woman anxious to have him at her house, and people beginning to speak of him as almost if not quite the first landscape-painter in England; with a splendid career before him; with plenty of money, a beautiful house, and heaps of friends; and then his family—well, no wonder he is a little proud of the Lindsays of Carnryan, and of the old tower overlooking the sea: just think of all that, mother, and yet I know it is worthless to him just because he cannot have Sabie's love—and Sabie's love he never will have in this world.'

'Don't be so sure,' the mother would answer.

'Ah, but I know,' the plain-featured gray-eyed Janie would continue (and she seemed rather to like talking about Miss Zembra). 'I know the only way to win Sabie's love;

it's through her pity. If you're poor, or ragged, or suffering—and look to her for help—that is the only way. Then her eyes grow soft. But why should she pity Mr. Lindsay, or take any interest in him? He has everything the world can give him—handsome, famous, with plenty of money and plenty of friends—how should he appeal to her pity?'

'Don't you say that he is miserable?'

Janie smiled a little—but not out of malice.

'She doesn't understand that kind of misery. No, nor that kind of love either. If you speak to her of that kind of love, she only laughs and turns away. Sabie will never marry—never.'

'Don't be so sure,' the mother would repeat: she had seen more things happen than her daughter had.

'Ah, but I know. And why should she marry? Doesn't she see how great a delight she can give to so many people? And it's so easy for her, mother. She has only to smile and look pleased, and people are grateful. When she comes into a room, it's like bringing sunlight; everybody's face brightens up. I wonder,' continued Janie Wygram, rather wistfully, 'if beautiful people know how thankful they should be for their beauty? I wonder if they know how easy it is for them to make friends—and to be kind——'

'I wish you would stop talking about her,' her mother would probably interpose at this juncture. 'She has made a fool of you.'

'And you, mother? You don't see much in Sabie? Well, it's a shame to speak of her as if it was only her beauty. It's her goodness. She's "better than she's bonny"—if that is possible.'

'She has got a stanch champion, anyway.'

One afternoon the young artist whose name was introduced so frequently in their repeated conversations was in his studio, up Ladbroke Grove way, and he was seated at an open piano, though he was not playing. He was a man of about eight and twenty or thirty, tall and spare, pale of face, with perfectly coal-black hair, and black eyes that were contemplative rather than observant—at least they were so at this moment. The studio was a large and handsome apartment, hung with tapestry, and stored with

all kinds of *bric-à-brac*, that spoke of Spain, and Tunis, and Egypt mostly, though there was a nondescript and picturesque variety and confusion prevailing throughout. Damascus-ware jugs, old violins, bits of Italian embroidery, Indian swords, eighteenth century ale-jugs, Sheraton chairs, pictures framed and unframed, photographs of popular actresses, wooden pipes, sheaves of brushes, books, stray music, invitation cards, Persian rugs, Rhodian dishes, tennis balls, cigar boxes, Syrian silks, all were flung together anyhow; but besides these ordinary paraphernalia of a modern studio, there were certain 'properties' more particularly wanted for the landscape artist's special work—a great mass of freshly-cut golden-blossomed furze, a sheaf of dried bulrushes, the stem of a birch tree with its hanging silvery flakes, and everywhere bunches of early spring flowers stuck carelessly into pots. And yet there was a kind of harmony in all this entanglement of things; they seemed appropriate; perhaps the sombre grayness of the afternoon had its effect. And perhaps, too, that had its effect on the mind of the young man sitting at the piano. When he put his fingers on the keys it was in a musing kind of way; and the chance bits of Mendelssohn or Chopin that he absently played seemed to come unsought for, as if it were his memory that was speaking to him. Sometimes his fingers rested idle; and then the silence was almost painfully distinct; for the studio was separated from the house by a strip of garden, and there was not even the ticking of a clock to be heard. He played one or two little waltzes by Mozart—curiously quaint and simple and melodious. He hummed to himself, as he touched the notes, Lillo's

Ritorna ch'io t'amo, mio primo sospir.

But by and by this languid and careless occupation ceased altogether; he sat for a little time plunged in a vague reverie; and then, as with an effort, he rose, shut the piano mechanically, and turned to face the empty studio. This seemed to bring him to his senses somewhat.

'It's a queer world,' he said to himself.

And yet he seemed irresolute. He took up a wooden pipe, but almost immediately put it down again; then he

went and stood in front of the unfinished landscape that was on the easel. It was a large water-colour drawing—an evening scene; the spire of a village church rising dark into the golden glow of the sunset sky; a river stealing in shadow underneath a grove of dusky elms; empty meadows with a pearly gray mist rising from them. It seemed to suggest silence, and remoteness, and perhaps a trifle of sadness too, for the day was dying away in the west, and the velvet-footed night coming stealthily over the land. But what a time and a place for lovers! There were no figures in this landscape; he had intentionally left it without any sign of life; it seemed secret and sacred at this sad hour; there was not even a swallow skimming over that still-flowing stream. But what, now, if some veiled and hooded maiden were to appear out of the golden glow beyond and come swiftly with timid footstep along by the hushed meadows and the whispering reeds? Could the gracious heavens be so bountiful—on some such evening as this—in the coming years—and she, the one maiden in all the world, be actually there, and he hastening towards her with wildly beating heart? Easily could he recognise her figure far away; there was but the one. And then the untying of the hood—and the beautiful tender eyes benignant—Sabina!

'If I were on my deathbed,' he said to himself, 'the image of that woman would come between me and my grave.'

But what had Sabina done that he should be angry with her? If he chose to make a fool of himself about a woman (he said to himself), that was none of her fault. And so, as the afternoon was dreary and uncomfortable, and not conducive to work, and the studio very silent and lonely, and the associations of this picture rather melancholy, he thought he would go away and seek for some society somewhere. And whose? Why, Janie Wygram's, to be sure—if haply he might find her at home. If not the rose, she was near the rose; and she would have something to say to him about Sabina.

He put on his hat and overcoat—and also a pair of gloves, for artists have abandoned their Bohemian manners

and customs nowadays, and he was about to pay an afternoon call. And as he walked away over Campden Hill Road, and so down into Kensington, how was it that his eye instinctively sought out any tall woman that he could see in the distance? It was very unlikely that accident should bring Sabina in his way. And yet the remote possibility was always there; and it lent an interest to all the neighbourhood of Kensington; and it had become an unconscious habit with him to look far ahead with this half-defined hope always present with him. And then, again, where the High Street narrows there is an abundance of shops; and there mammas and daughters congregate, passing by the windows slowly; and if by chance he were to find Sabina in that throng! In especial there was a florist's shop that was of interest to him; for Sabina, when she came round that way, generally called there to carry home some flowers for Mrs. Wygram, who herself could not well afford such luxuries. However, on this particular afternoon (as on many and many another one) his half-intentional scrutiny was fruitless; and so he turned down Young Street and made for the Wygrams' house in Kensington Square.

Janie was upstairs in her mother's room; she saw him come along the pavement.

'There's Mr. Lindsay, mother.'

'You must go down, then, and make some excuse. I can't see him in this state; besides, I'm busy.'

'Oh, I can entertain him well enough, mother,' the younger woman said. 'You've only to talk to him about Sabie.'

Of course, it was not Mr. Lindsay who introduced that subject when these two were seated in the dusky drawing-room. Oh no; Mr. Lindsay talked about theatres, and new books, and music; and when Miss Wygram incidentally mentioned that Sabie was spending that afternoon with her people at Lancaster Gate, he did not say anything at all. Nay, when Miss Wygram (who was a kind-hearted creature) would insist on talking about Sabie, and the good she was doing, and her kindness, and her gentleness, and her courage, and all the rest, he listened respectfully, it is true, but did not betray much interest.

'Of course she has her faults,' said Janie.

'Oh, indeed,' said he (thinking himself very cunning). 'Well, now, it would be something to hear of them. As every one has nothing but praises for Miss Zembra, it would be quite refreshing to hear unkind things said of her.'

Janie winced. That she should be thought capable, even in jest, of saying unkind things of her dearest? Nevertheless she continued:

'Oh yes, she has faults, and plenty,' she said cheerfully. 'How could one love her if she were perfect? Faults, oh yes. For one thing she is a little too anxious to have every one fond of her. She can't bear that any one should be quite indifferent about her. She likes to be well thought of. I don't know that it is exactly vanity—for it is not her appearance she thinks of—it's herself that she wants people to like. And more than that, she insists on it. If an ill-conditioned brat of a boy will have nothing to say to her, you will see her deliberately neglect the whole of the family until she has won him over in spite of himself. Or an old woman. Old women are sometimes cynical. They distrust pretty eyes. Then you should see Sabie. Oh, she is a hypocrite—an out-and-out hypocrite. But that is the one thing she cannot bear—that anybody should be quite indifferent about her.'

'So far,' said he, 'Miss Zembra's faults don't seem to be very serious. Some people would call them virtues. I don't think it is much against a woman—and particularly a young woman—that she should wish to be thought well of. It seems to me quite natural. And as for wishing people to be fond of her, surely that is natural too! The strange thing to me is that she should experience any difficulty.'

She knew he would come to Sabie's defence—knew it perfectly when she began. And she thought she would reward him; she had observed his eyes wandering occasionally towards a photograph that stood on the mantelpiece; she went and fetched that.

'This is the last that has been done of Sabie; do you think it like?'

He took the photograph in his hand.

'Like——' he said, after a second. 'Why, it's herself—her very self! And so natural and simple the whole thing—and so good-natured she looks.'

'Would you care to have it?' she said, with an air of indifference. She meant him to understand that she could have as many photographs of Sabie as she chose.

He looked up quickly and eagerly.

'May I have it?'

'Oh yes, if you care for it. I have plenty of others. Only a studio is such a public place—people come strolling in, and you would have to explain that it was I who gave it you.'

'But do you think I would have it lying about? I can assure you, no. If I may have it I will lock it away as my greatest treasure.'

'Oh, but you must not say such things,' said Miss Janie, laughing. 'And about the studio, Mr. Lindsay, I hope you did not think it rude of us going in the other day?'

'It was the most awful piece of bad luck that ever happened to me that I should have been out,' he answered. 'And Mrs. Reid not to have offered you tea! She's a dreadfully stupid woman, that woman.'

'But I suppose she was so frightened by our boldness,' said Miss Janie. 'You see, it was such a temptation. Sabie had never been in a studio before. And then mother happened to be with us; and it was really her doing; for when Mrs. Reid said you were not at home, mother said: "Oh, that's all right; we'll go and rummage over the place." And Sabie said: "Oh, he's so good-natured, he won't mind." And you should have seen how interested she was—especially in the embroidery; and she wondered who could have taught you to pick up such things. Yes, and the picture—you should have heard what she said——'

'But which one?' he said quickly; it was all music to his ears.

'The one on the easel—your know—the one with the church and the trees and the river—the evening one——'

'Did she like that?'

'Oh yes; you should have heard. And when Sabie likes a thing, she tells you.'

'Miss Wygram, would you do me a very, very great favour?' said he. 'Do you think you could get her to accept it?'

'What?'

'That picture. Do you think Miss Zembra would take it? I should be so glad if she would. It is a fair exchange. I have her portrait. Do you think she would take that drawing, if I finished it and had it framed for her?'

'But what would she do with it?' Miss Janie said; she was a little bit frightened, thinking she had said too much; and she knew that Mr Lindsay's pictures fetched very large prices, for water-colours.

'Why, she might hang it up in her room, if she cared anything for it at all. Or over there—she might hang it there—and it would be hers all the same. Do you think you could induce her to accept it—if it was framed, and made a little more presentable?'

'Oh no, no, no, Mr. Lindsay,' Miss Janie said earnestly. 'It's bad enough for a parcel of strangers to go into an artist's studio——'

'Strangers!' said he.

'But to plunder him as well, simply because you happen to say you like a particular picture——'

'But you don't know,' he broke in. 'Why, you don't know what pleasure it would give me if Miss Zembra would only take that picture. It's nothing. It's a foolish kind of thing. But if she sees anything in it—if she would take it——'

'I'm sure she would not,' said Miss Janie promptly; 'and I know I should get into sad trouble if she discovered that I was the cause of your making so generous an offer. But—but—now, shall I be frank with you?'

'Yes; but be frank in this way. I will give you the picture, and you will hang it up in her room,' said he.

'Oh no; how could that be? But—but—if you would make a small sketch of it—something that would not cost you too much trouble—I'm sure she would be glad to have that.'

'Are you sure she would take it?' he said eagerly.

'I'm sure she would be very, very much pleased to have it,' said Miss Janie frankly. 'But you see how it is, Mr. Lindsay; it's difficult for people who are not artists to accept a valuable picture. It's all very well for artists, who can repay in kind.'

'Then you think there is nothing in winning approval —there is nothing in being able to gratify a friend?' said he.

'Oh yes; if every one was as pretty as Sabie, I could understand it,' she rejoined. 'But even in her case——'

And then he grew bold.

'Now I am going to tell you something,' said he, 'and to ask of you the greatest favour I ever asked of anybody. Have you heard of Borella, the new baritone? No? Well, he has only sung at one or two houses, privately, as yet; but he is something wonderful, I assure you; the quality of his voice is perfectly marvellous, and the skill with which he adapts it to a small room just as marvellous, too. Well, he is coming to my studio Thursday next week, in the evening; and there will be a few young people there; and there will be a little music, and a little supper, and so forth; and I was wondering if your mother and you would be so kind as to join the little party. You see——'

'I think I know,' interposed Miss Janie, with a smile; and although she was not pretty, she could look friendly and amiable on occasion, and she had a little sympathy with this unhappy young man. 'I think I know. You would like mother to go up in the afternoon, and have a little chat with Mrs. Reid about the supper, and the arrangement of the flowers, and so forth?'

'Would she be so kind?'

'But as for me,' said Miss Janie demurely, 'what use should I be? Well, would you like me to bring Sabie with me?'

He lowered his eyes to hide their anxiety.

'Do you think Miss Zembra would care to come up for even half an hour?' said he. 'Borella is a very good-natured fellow; he told me that if he came at all it would be to sing for my guests. I think she would be pleased. I am sure she would be pleased.'

'But that's not the way to put it when you're talking about Sabie. The question is—Can she do a kindness to anybody?'

'I should consider it more than a kindness,' he said in rather a low voice.

'Oh, I'll bring Sabie along,' Miss Janie said cheerfully.

'Will you?' he said. He looked up. 'It is a promise, mind. And you know, Miss Janie' (for he permitted himself this familiarity on rare occasions), 'I am going to insist on your taking that sunset sketch as a present from me. Oh yes, you must. When I have offered anybody anything, then it is no longer mine.'

'But, good gracious, Mr. Lindsay, what should I do with such a valuable picture?' said Miss Janie, frightened again.

'It will become valuable if you accept it,' said he gently. 'And there is the very place to hang it, over there; and if Miss Zembra would care to have a little replica of it, I should be very happy to do that for her at any time.'

He rose and took his hat.

'I will send your mother a little reminder note about Thursday next week,' said he. 'And I hope you won't forget your promise about Miss Zembra.'

'Oh, I'll bring Sabie along,' was the confident answer. 'Good-bye.'

Dark had fallen over Kensington now; but for him the gray melancholy that hung about the dismal streets was filled with all kinds of brilliant and happy visions. Sabina was coming to his little party; and now the question was as to what he could do and plan and contrive for the entertainment of this radiant visitor. Neither Mrs. Reid nor Mrs. Wygram, to begin with, was to be entrusted with the supper arrangements; he would go forthwith to a famous confectioner and bid him do his best, sparing neither cost nor trouble. And he would call on the great baritone, and make sure of him. Then, whatever Covent Garden could produce in the way of flowers would make that one night sweet and memorable; with this proviso, that while the florist might exercise his fancy as he pleased

with regard to the little bouquets or button-holes placed on the table for the guests, he—that is to say, the host himself—would reserve for himself, and for himself alone, the devising of the bouquet that Sabina would find awaiting her!

CHAPTER IV

FRED FOSTER

An angry man indeed was Sir Anthony Zembra when he found that the stranger who had been thus unceremoniously thrust into his house promised to be a fixture there, at least for a considerable time. And naturally he was impatient to know who he was; but he would not ask Sabina; he made his inquiries of Dr. Hungerford, plainly intimating the while that as likely as not this unwelcome guest was a common swindler, and all the fuss about the hurt knee part of a scheme of robbery.

'He would be an enterprising burglar who would get himself smashed about like that on purpose,' said the young surgeon, laughing. 'Anyhow, Sir Anthony, it will be many a day before he is able to run away with anything. And I will say this for him: he tries to make as light of his injuries as may be—especially if Miss Zembra is within hearing, and talks quite contentedly about the whole affair. He has pluck, at all events——'

'Yes, yes; but—but—God bless my soul, I want to know who he is! Who is he? What is he?' Sir Anthony demanded.

'Well, I think I should call him, speaking generally, a sporting character,' the surgeon answered. 'At least I can't make out that he has any occupation besides riding steeplechases, backing horses, playing billiards, and so forth; but his interest in such matters seems to be of an all-round character. He offered to lay me six to four on Oxford for the boat-race.'

'Professional conversation!' Sir Anthony said.

'My fault, at all events,' the young surgeon said promptly. 'Well, it is neither that race nor any other that he'll be present at for many a day to come, poor fellow.'

'What I want to know is,' observed Sir Anthony, coldly, 'when you mean to remove him from this house. I don't see that we are responsible for the accident in any way whatever; and really to have one's domestic arrangements upset in this fashion, on behalf of a stranger, is perfectly absurd. Common humanity? Common stupidity! When is this gentleman jockey, or whatever he is—"gentleman jock" is the phrase, isn't it?—when is he going to clear out of my house?'

'Well, now, Sir Anthony,' the surgeon said, 'I would beg of you not to hurry his removal. I would rather not run any risk, unless you have imperative need of the room. I daresay everything will go on well; his constitution seems to be a sound and healthy one; and as soon as it is fairly safe we will have him taken away—but not to his own rooms, I hope. Bury Street, St. James's, is not a very cheerful place for a man who will have to be on his back for the next month or two. I don't know what his means are; but if he could afford to go to Brighton—if he were to get a front room on the King's Road or the Marine Parade, that would be more lively for him. And then on a fine day he might be wheeled down the pier on a stretcher, and get the sea air and the sunlight into his blood.'

'I cannot say that I feel called upon to concern myself about the young man,' observed Sir Anthony, in his lofty manner, 'although one naturally wishes him a speedy recovery. In the meantime I shall be glad to have the use and freedom of my own house again at the very earliest opportunity.'

Lady Zembra, for her part, flatly declined to allow the maid Catherine to be for ever dancing attendance on the sick-room; and as Sabina could not do everything herself —and as, moreover, she could not wholly neglect certain charges of hers down in the Chelsea district—she got in a trained nurse to help her, defraying the cost out of her own pocket. But she herself spent a large portion of each day in the invalid's chamber; and she would bring him news-

papers and illustrated journals and books, and would sit amiably chatting with him to lighten the tedium of this enforced confinement. Fred Foster, it must be confessed, was not much of a reader; when he had glanced at the latest betting for the Lincolnshire Handicap, and seen how Cherry Blossom stood for the Liverpool Grand National, he was content to put the evening paper aside, and would rather talk to Sabina, in a timid and respectful and grateful way. And yet he spoke cheerfully, too, for he would not have her think he was fretting overmuch; and as they became better friends he was quite frankly garrulous about himself, and his experiences, and companions, and pursuits. It was a new world, this that was being opened to her; and yet it was interesting in a fashion; for she was a friendly and sympathetic kind of creature, and accustomed to meeting diverse people, who all had their own way of life. And there was a sort of good-natured cynicism and saturnine honesty in this young man's talk that was in a measure attractive; and he seemed to have seen a good deal of the world for one of his years.

But it was when he told her all about his home in Buckinghamshire, and the old people there, that he pleased her most. It appeared that he was returning from a visit to them (having sent on his portmanteau by rail) when he met with the smash in Bayswater Road. His father, he told her, had a good many years ago laid out his last penny on property down Amersham and Missenden way, in the expectation of a railway being made along the valley; but the railway never came; land would not sell at all; farms were letting badly; and times were not as they used to be. Still, that seemed a comfortable home that he talked about; and Sabina, sitting in this silent room and listening with friendly interest to his idle discourse, could see for herself the big, old-fashioned, red-brick house fronting the road; a row of tall elms outside; inside the low, wide hall, with its pillars; rambling corridors and rooms with casemented windows; a spacious garden behind; and, busy in the vineries, an old gentleman in velveteen coat and gaiters, with a velvet cap and tassel on his head, a pair of shears in his hands, and not far away from him a long clay pipe.

'But it's the Mater,' he would say (and he was fond of returning to this point, and Sabina liked to hear him speak in this fashion),—'it's the Mater has been my stand-by through thick and thin; and whatever happens to me, I know I've got one friend. Well, you see, the governor has been rather inclined to cut up rough with me from time to time, and no wonder, for I have been an idle wretch; I mean, the only things I can do well don't seem to bring in much coin, and I daresay I have been a disappointment to him. But the old lady is my stanch friend through everything. And mind, I don't mean only in the way of money. No, no. You see, Miss Zembra, a man who has had a little experience in turf affairs, and mixed himself up in that kind of life—well, I don't suppose that he can have the highest notions about human nature, and be too ready to believe in people; but it's a very capital thing for him if he knows that somewhere or other—no matter where, but somewhere—there is one human being that is just as good as gold. I suppose, now, at my age, my one perfect human being should be a young woman, not an old one—a divinity and angel about eighteen or twenty. Well, I've never met any of that kind; I've never met any girl even fit to be compared to my mother. It isn't ribbons, and scents, and a dogcart and a pair of ponies driven tandem, for her; she doesn't think what she can get out of you; it's what she can do for you, that she thinks of; she's just as good as gold, she is.'

'And I hope and am sure you will always think so,' Sabina said. 'But why should you have disappointed your father?'

'Well, you see, my wares don't fetch a big price in the world's market,' said he, and there was an odd kind of simplicity in his self-disparagement. 'What am I to do? I can ride a horse; and I've even been complimented at times for a niceish bit of mouth-touching. And I play a fair game at billiards. And I'd back myself at a pigeon-match even against the Claimant, and that is saying something——'

'Pigeon-shooting?' she said—there was the least trace of surprise in her tone, and that of itself was a compliment.

'I beg your pardon—I shouldn't have mentioned that,' he said, laughing a little. 'Sentiment has changed. But don't you believe the nonsense that is talked about pigeon-shooting, either, Miss Zembra. It used to be the most fashionable thing going; it isn't now; and why? Because it's easy? Because it's merely slaughter? Not a bit; it's because it's too difficult—and a score is kept. If you put a man into a hot corner at a pheasant-shoot and let him blaze away, he'll make a bag somehow, and nobody counts the misses; it's different in an open field, with a crowd of fashionable people looking on, and the reporters with their note-books just behind you. Did you ever hear of the Lords and Commons pigeon-shooting match at Hurlingham? No; before your time, I suppose. And before mine, too, rather; but I've seen the score; and if you look at that score you'll find how it was that pigeon-shooting ceased to be fashionable. People always turn their backs on what they can't do. You don't like to have all your lady-friends looking on while you show what a duffer you are; and you don't want to have the score in the newspapers next day. Then don't you believe the stories about the maiming of the pigeons either; that's all newspaper nonsense. Do you think they'd get a single man to lay a sovereign if anything like that were allowed? No, no; and of course the betting-men back the pigeon; they know he'll play fair; they may not be sure about the noble sportsman; but they know the bird will try to get away if he can. You can't "pull" a pigeon.'

However, he saw by the expression of her face—and 'in her hazel eyes her thoughts lay clear, as pebbles in a brook'—that this was not a wholly grateful subject; and he got away from it. She was far more pleased by his descriptions of the morning gallops, before breakfast, on Epsom Downs; and he spoke rather wistfully about them; and she thought it a pitiable thing that he should be lying here, helpless. But whether he spoke wistfully or cheerfully, all the way through these chance conversations there ran an innocent assumption that she must be interested; and she did become interested, without hardly knowing why. For one thing, he talked about horses with a genuine enthusiasm; and she

grew to sympathise in his admiration of skilful riding; and could almost understand how Jem Robinson burst into tears of vexation when he found he had been tricked by the lad Twitchet; and she was sorry for Fordham when she was told how Sam Rogers had served him the same turn. It was a new world to her; and there were plenty of strange characters in it, and striking incidents, and moving histories. She grew almost familiar with its physical aspects; when he described the Grand National course, she had to construct in her imagination the successive thorn-fences and hurdles bushed with gorse, and Beecher's Brook, and Valentine's Brook, and the Water Jump, and then again the hurdles on the straight way for home. Cherry Blossom was now at 11 to 2, and still first favourite; and how could she help hoping the horse would win, seeing that this young man, who seemed so good-natured, and cheerful, and patient, under his grievously bad luck, was so obviously anxious about it?

The Duke of Exminster called on Fred Foster to see how he was getting on; and very sorry was that young gentleman that Sabina happened to be out.

'Very sorry,' he said; 'I should like you to have met, if just for once, the very straightest man that ever had anything to do with the English turf—the very straightest, and all his life through, too. I wonder who ever heard of him "readying" a horse and running it out of form so as to scoop the big handicap afterwards——'

'But is it so unusual to find an honest man on the turf?' Sabina asked.

He did not answer; he only said evasively, and a little grimly, 'Horse-racing is a great game; and it has got to be played different ways.'

Now, as has already been said, the training that Sabina had voluntarily undergone had taught her a wide catholicity of sympathy; and she had long ago got rid of any Pharisaical notion that because a certain way of life is right for this or that person, it is necessarily so for all. This kind of life that he described, if it did not appear to be informed by any lofty purpose, or to be exerting any beneficial influence on others, was nevertheless apparently joyous and

merry, and so far it was distinctly well; while it was certainly not one whit more selfish than the lives of the vast majority of the people—highly respectable and praiseworthy people—whom she saw around her. Perhaps there was a trifle too much luncheon-basket in it; and there was a pretty continuous popping of champagne-bottles; but on the other hand that was probably the handiest way of celebrating victories; and, for the rest, there seemed to be a considerable amount of good comradeship and generous help for the unfortunate in this set that he described. Nay, when she began and told him a little of how she spent her own time—what her occupations were, and so forth—he said he was quite ashamed of himself; and wondered what she would think of him, who could but talk of horses, and hounds, and partridges, and tennis courts, while she was engaged in such unselfish and noble work.

'But then,' said he, looking at her, 'there are not many like you.'

'What do you mean?' she said.

'Oh, I can't tell you to your face,' he answered gently; and then an unaccustomed flush mantled in the pale and beautiful forehead; and she turned quickly aside to get for him his lemon-juice and soda-water, which was the beverage allowed him at this time.

On another occasion he said, 'You know, it's awfully good of you, Miss Zembra, to bother yourself about me, and to come and chat with me now and again; and you so busy. But I have remorse of conscience; I have indeed. I really must ask you not to let me take up so much of your time—there are so many others who have better claims.'

'Perhaps you forget how you came to be here at all,' said Sabina.

'Oh, but you must put that out of your head,' he insisted. 'You were in no way responsible for the accident. Anybody's dog would have brought about the same thing. Or rather, it was my own stupidity that did it; for I should have seen the little heap of gravel. Or rather—and this is the truth—it was a piece of pure bad luck. I've come a cropper many a time before; but this time, by pure bad

luck, I chanced to hit the kerbstone. Well, why should you consider yourself responsible for that? However, you must not think me ungrateful for all your goodness to me; and I have been wondering whether you wouldn't let me take a little part in what you are doing. I mean,' he added, with a touch of half-amused embarrassment, 'you might bring me luck—that is, supposing Schiller were to win the Shipley Hall Handicap on Tuesday next, would you accept a ten-pound note for distribution among your poor people?'

'Oh yes, certainly, if you care to give it me,' said Miss Zembra promptly; she had long ago ceased to be squeamish about such matters.

'It's rather a shabby offer, isn't it, to make it conditional?' he continued. 'But every loose farthing I've got I've put on that horse; and if I were out and about now I'd sell my boots, I believe, and clap everything on; for it's as good as a moral, so the Duke says. And then there's the glory—you see, I own a sixth share in this horse—'

Miss Zembra had taken up the evening paper; she wanted to know something about the animal that was perhaps to win ten pounds for her.

'The Derby Meeting,' he said. 'The Shipley Hall Handicap.'

'Oh yes, here it is,' she said. 'Schiller, 4 to 1 against. That does not look promising, does it?'

'Promising enough. I wish it was 20 to 1. I know the old horse will pull it off for us this time, though it isn't a big thing. We can't all be dukes.'

'But with regard to the ten pounds, now,' said Sabina rather diffidently; 'I am afraid I accepted heedlessly.'

'Oh, a bargain's a bargain,' he said, with much cheerfulness; 'and I think you'll find by next Tuesday afternoon that Schiller has landed you that ten-pound note for your pensioners: the money might go a worse way.'

It may be said generally that he bore this imprisonment with really remarkable fortitude, the more so that, when Sabina was absent, the other members of the household did nothing at all to relieve his solitude. Lady Zembra

was so kind as to make inquiries about him from day to day of the nurse; and Sir Anthony would ask an occasional question of the doctor; but it was very clear that their solicitude was prompted solely by their desire to know when he was going away. In these circumstances, Sabina did what she could to keep him amused; and gave him as much of her time as was possible; and in this way she came to know his history, even from his boyhood's days, in a curiously intimate fashion. He liked to talk; he was grateful to so gentle and considerate a listener; for, indeed, in her attitude towards him there was an almost maternal kindliness and patience and sympathy. One would scarcely have remembered that, as a matter of fact, he was a couple of years older than she was. He talked to her as if he knew she would pass no harsh judgment when he made confession; and also as if he was sure beforehand that she would like well enough to know all about his first pistol, and his adventures with his pony, and his bird-stuffing, and his various scrapes at school, and the gradual way in which in after life he became associated with the sporting world. She got to understand all about his somewhat strained relations with his father; his dependence on his mother, and his abundant gratitude towards her; his general habits of life; his opinions of particular men; his manner of looking at the tricks of fickle fortune. Moreover, through all this self-revelation there ran a vein of sarcasm that gave it piquancy. His judgment of people and things was shrewd and sharp; so was his judgment of himself; and there was a kind of innocent saturnine honesty about him that amused her, and attracted her at the same time.

'If I had broken my neck that time I pitched on the pavement,' he said, on one occasion, 'I suppose I should have had to give an account of myself. Well, I should just have said this: "Lord, there are some would tell you I was a very good sort of fellow; but I know I've been rather a bad sort of fellow; only, I was just what you made me."'

And it was hardly her business to point out to him that this theory of moral responsibility—or irresponsibility—

was of a primitive and unworkable character. One thing, finally, was certain; this man interested her; and Janie Wygram had maintained that, so far, Sabina had never shown herself interested (in Janie's sense of the phrase) in any man.

CHAPTER V

SER FEDERIGO'S FALCON

NATURALLY Janie Wygram regarded with anything but favour the young man who was thus claiming so much of her beloved Sabie's attention; and her jealousy of him made her all the more determined that Sabina should go to Walter Lindsay's party.

'But why should I go?' Sabina said quite good-naturedly. 'Some people are interested in such things, but I am not. Standing about among a lot of half-strangers and trying to talk about things that are quite indifferent to you——'

'Oh, but Sabie, you don't know,' her friend said; 'it's not like that at Mr. Lindsay's. They're small parties, and there's no one asked who isn't either clever, or pretty, or remarkable in some way; and there is every kind of freedom and amusement and merriment. You will find no old people there at all except mother, who is to play duenna for all of us.'

'No, no, Janie,' Sabina said; 'I should most likely be tired by that time of night, and you wouldn't want a kill-joy to come in among a lot of young folks amusing themselves.'

'But you can't help going, Sabie, dear,' her friend said insidiously.

'Indeed. And why?'

'Not when I tell you that you will confer a great kindness on several people, and on two in particular. That is enough reason for you, Sabie.'

Sabina laughed; it was a dexterous piece of flattery.

'But who are the two people in particular?' she asked.

'Mr. Lindsay is the one, and I am the other.'

'Then I will go to please you,' Sabina said, in her frank and generous way; and forthwith the glad-hearted Janie made swiftly for her own room to send a little note to Mr. Lindsay, informing him of the joyful news.

As the eventful evening drew near, the little Mrs. Wygram assumed a more and more important air; for she had undertaken to superintend the domestic arrangements for the young artist; and she was in all his secrets; and very earnest were their confabulations together. But one afternoon she came home looking rather puzzled.

'Janie,' she said to her daughter, 'what is it about a falcon?'

'What falcon, mother?'

'I don't understand at all; but twice to-day he has said the same thing; you see, I was remonstrating with him about his extravagance; and really the way he is going on is absurd; oh, I assure you, there is nothing in Covent Garden half good enough; I believe he would telegraph to the Brazils if there was time to get back the things. Well, I was saying how absurd it was, and that people did not expect such entertainments at a bachelor's house; and then it was he said, "I wish there was nothing left but my falcon." And then again he said, "But when is the falcon to be brought in?" And when I asked him what falcon, he only laughed and turned to something else.'

'Mother,' cried Janie, 'don't you know? Don't you know the old Italian story?'

The mother looked as puzzled as ever.

'Why, it has been told a hundred times. It was about a young gentleman of Florence who wasted all his wealth in giving entertainments to please his lady-love, but she did not care for him; she married some one else; and he went away into the country, very poor, and having nothing left him but his pet falcon. Then by and by she became a widow; and she was living in the country, too; and her little boy fell sick, and nothing would do but that he must have the falcon that he had seen flying over the neighbouring garden. So she went with another lady to the house,

and there was her former lover, and he was greatly distressed that there was nothing in the house he could have cooked for them, for she had said that she would eat something. Do you understand now, mother? He bade his servant go quickly and strangle the falcon—the last of all his possessions—and that was cooked and brought in and set before them. And then, of course, when the lady made her request about the falcon, he had to confess what he had done in order to entertain her; and she was so much struck by his generosity that she fell in love with him, and married him. Have you never heard the story? The young gentleman's name was Federigo; and the lady's Monna Giovanna. And you may be sure that was what Mr. Lindsay meant, mother; and very certain I am that he would be content to part with everything he has, and to sacrifice pet falcon and everything else, if that would only win him his Monna Giovanna.'

'And who may she be?' the mother said demurely.

'Oh, of course, you don't know, mother! It would never enter your head—not for a moment—that it was our Sabie who is Mr. Lindsay's Monna Giovanna.'

'What fools men are!' the mother sighed.

'They may or they may not be; I don't know,' the daughter said valiantly; 'but I do know that if I were a man I should consider myself a fool if I were not in love with Sabie.'

And at length the great evening arrived; and everything had been done that the most anxious consideration could think of; and all that was wanting now was the presence of Sabina to irradiate the feast. As a matter of fact, she and Mrs. Wygram and Janie came rather late; all the others had assembled, and were idling away the time in the studio, laughing and joking and examining the sketches; but Walter Lindsay was in the front of the house, by himself, and rather nervously waiting. Then there was the noise of a cab; the gate bell was rung; and the next moment he was outside and down through the little garden, just in time to receive them. This was rather a dusky thoroughfare; and the yellow gas lamps gave but little relief; but it seemed to him that when Sabina stepped out on to the pave-

ment—so tall and queenly she was, and yet with such a frank and generous good nature in her face—that there was some kind of moonlight around. He had eyes only for her; he was a little bewildered; she seemed something radiant—here in the dusk.

'It is very kind of you to come,' he said; but he did not know what he was saying.

He accompanied them into the house; could this beautiful creature know how great a favour she was conferring by merely stepping within the door? And she smiled so graciously on the little maid who asked them to go into the improvised cloak-room: did she know that that too was a kindness?—that she could so easily make friends with her winning looks and her gentle manner? But at this moment Janie Wygram hung back from her companions, and said to him, in a half-whisper, 'Is the falcon being cooked?'

'There is no such luck for me,' said he; and then he added quickly, 'but do you think, now, that Miss Zembra could be prevailed upon to take away some little trifle as a souvenir? There are all kinds of things in the studio—if you found her interested in any of them, could you give me a hint—anything, no matter what—anything in the house——'

'I don't know,' said Miss Janie; but she could not add another word then, for she had to follow her companions into the cloak-room.

Forthwith he sent word to have supper served as soon as possible; and when these new guests reappeared he would have them remain in the drawing-room. He seemed to forget the others whom he had left in the studio. It was Sabina whom he wanted to look at these sketches, and medallions, and miniatures, and what not; and so anxious was he to interest her, and so strangely did the magic of her presence affect him, that his fingers were not so steady as they might have been.

'Why, your hand shakes,' she said (for she was rather blunt-spoken on occasion). 'What is it? Too much Arts Club at midnight?'

It was a cruel speech, though it was not meant cruelly.

How could he explain to her what it was that made his hand a trifle unsteady? Or how could he say to her that he would willingly never enter within the doors of the Arts Club again, if she but expressed the slightest wish on the subject?

'But your other friends, Mr. Lindsay?' said Mrs. Wygram, who considered herself responsible for the proper conduct of the proceedings. 'Should we not go into the studio?'

'Oh no,' said he; 'they're all right. Borella is there; he will keep them lively enough.' In fact, they could hear the sound of a piano in the distance. 'That is another thing I wanted to warn you about, Miss Janie. Don't you keep insisting on encores. Borella is the best fellow in the world, but he is rather noisy, and he likes to monopolise the piano. Now when he wants to go, let him go; and then we shall have a nice quiet evening by ourselves.'

Of course, Miss Janie knew very well it was about Sabina he was thinking; perhaps she might not like too hilarious an evening; for there was something grave and serious in her manner, even with all its gracious sweetness.

Then came the butler (he was a butler only at night; by day he was an old-man model, and favourably known throughout the studios for his prominent nose and shaggy eyebrows: it should be said, moreover, that his ability in both capacities was marked, and that he could decant a bottle of port just as well as he could pose as an ancient Highland cateran, or a scowling miser, or a smiling grand-papa) to say that supper was served; and Mr. Lindsay escorted these three guests into the dining-room. It was a clever little scheme.

'Miss Zembra,' said he, 'will you take this seat, if you please? Mrs. Wygram has been so kind as to offer to take the other end of the table—she can see that things are going on rightly—and—and the servants understand——'

It was a clever little scheme; for now, without fear of any mistake, Miss Zembra would be seated next him, and on his right hand also; and there awaiting her was the bouquet he had himself designed for her; while Mrs. Wygram, instead of being annoyed at not finding herself in

the place of honour, considered herself promoted to the position of mistress of the feast. Janie Wygram smiled to herself, but said nothing; and with a light heart Walter Lindsay went away to summon his other guests from the studio.

It was a pretty scene at that supper-table when they had all come in and taken their places—the shining silver and the Venetian glass; the shaded candles shedding a soft roseate glow on the cover; the abundant flowers; the baskets of fruit; the faces of the young men and maidens growing blither as the talk became more and more animated. And if there was a trifle too much noise in the neighbourhood of the blackavised baritone—who was telling very, very old stories in half-intelligible English, and laughing boisterously at the same—well, that was all the more convenient for any of the quieter folk, who perhaps had their own little sentences (timid and hesitating, and hardly daring to say all that might be said) to communicate to each other in their small, separate sets. Walter Lindsay was not sorry to be able to murmur a word or two unheard by the general crowd, even if there was no particular secret to be conveyed; it was something that he could speak to Sabina, as it were, alone. And then she was looking so beautiful this evening—so calm, and bland, and complaisant; and the gracious outline of her neck, as she bent forward a little to listen, was something to steal one's heart away. Her stepmother had said she was a dowdy in her dress. Well, on ordinary busy days she generally wore a tight-fitting gown of brownish-gray homespun, with a jacket to match; and her brown felt bonnet was serviceable enough; and if you had met her in Kensington High Street, or in Cromwell Road, you would have thought little of the costume, though perhaps her stature, and her gait, and the set of her head might have attracted a brief notice. But to-night there was naturally something different. She wore a dress of pale blue Indian silk, with a *fichu* of faintly yellow lace coming round the neck and bosom; and for sole ornament, where the *fichu* met the gown, there was a bunch of real forget-me-nots. Walter Lindsay looked at these from time to time. What falcon would he not have sacrificed to gain possession of any one of them?

And yet he had a little score to settle with her. If any other person had told him that he had a shaky hand, he would not have heeded much; besides such was not the case, for although he had the artist's temperament, and was exceedingly sensitive in many ways, his nerves were as sound as a bell. But that Sabina should have taunted him was too bad; and her reference to the Arts Club!

'Miss Zembra,' he made bold to say (but still in that undertone that he seemed to prefer), 'what did you mean by saying that my hand shook?'

'Did I?' she said, and she looked up. And then something in his manner appeared to amuse her. 'If I hurt your feelings, I am very sorry.'

'What did you mean by too much Arts Club at midnight?' said he, for he was determined to clear himself of the charge.

'I am a hospital nurse on occasion,' she said, laughing. 'I suppose I spoke professionally. But really, I did not mean anything serious, Mr. Lindsay — oh, of course not.'

'But I'm going to have it out with you,' said he. 'I want just to see whether you or I have the steadier hand——'

'No, no; if I apologise to you——'

'But I want to see. Now just you lift your wine-glass and I will hold up mine, and we will see who can let them come closest without actually touching.'

Well, she was good-natured; they went through that little performance; and certainly both their hands now seemed steady enough.

'Can I do more than apologise?' she said, as she put down her glass again. 'I did not mean to offend you.'

'Offend me!' He looked at her; that was all.

Meanwhile, the robust baritone had chanced to catch sight of that raising of glasses, and imagining that it was merely the revival of an old custom, he set to work at his end of the table, and presently there was a good deal of drinking of healths and clinking of glasses, with even an occasional '*Stosst an!—setzt an!—fertig!—los!*' It was in the midst of this hubbub of chatter and merriment that

Mrs. Wygram found an opportunity of saying to her daughter, who happened to sit next her:

'Janie, don't look up the table, but do you know what is going on? I can tell you. Are you aware that your darling Sabina is showing herself as nothing else than an outrageous flirt?'

'She is not, mother!' Janie said indignantly. 'She doesn't know what flirtation is!'

'It's a remarkable good imitation of it then that is going on up there,' said the little old lady, still with her eyes cast down. 'I've never seen anything worse anywhere. Why, Mr. Lindsay has not said a word to a soul since we sat down to supper; he has eyes and ears for nobody but her!'

'And whose fault is that?' said Janie; 'that is his fault, not hers. Of course, she is kind to him, as she would be to any one sitting in his place. It's little you know about Sabie if you think that of her.'

'I can use my eyes,' said Mrs. Wygram, 'and they're older than yours, my girl.'

'You know you're only saying that to vex me, mother; and you can't do it. No, you can't; I know Sabie better than that.'

'At all events,' the mother said, to close this underhand discussion,—'at all events Mr. Lindsay is having one happy evening in his life.'

Nor was Mrs. Wygram the only one who was casually observant of what was going on at the upper end of the table. A tall, rather good-looking fellow—a recently elected Associate he was, and very proud of his new honours—said to his neighbour, who was a lively little maiden with a roseate face, a piquant nose, and raven-black hair, 'Who is the lady of the forget-me-nots?'

She glanced up the table.

'Oh, don't you know? That is Miss Zembra—a daughter of Sir Anthony Zembra—the Parliament man, don't you know? Pretty, isn't she?'

'How long have Walter Lindsay and she known each other?' he asked. There was some kind of significance in his tone.

'I think for some time,' said his companion. 'But I believe she has never been in his house before. She doesn't care for such things—nursing babies and old women is more in her line. It's all very well if they would only wash their faces.'

'Oh, they've known each other for some time?'

'I believe so.'

'Oh, they've known each other for some time?'

What did he mean by this repetition? What he was trying to do, at all events, was to get his companion to raise her eyes to his, to ask what his meaning was; but she was a shrewd little lass, and knew better than to be drawn into any such understanding.

'Well, I suppose it's none of my business,' he said finally; and that was a very sensible conclusion.

And now did Walter Lindsay call down the blessings of heaven on Borella's wildly-matted head; for the noisy baritone had taken to performing conjuring tricks, and the attention of every one at the table was directed towards him. And Sabina wished to look on also, for she loved amusement as well as any one, when the chance was there, but her companion would not let her. He was sure she had had no supper at all. A little more wine, then? for she seemed to like the perfume of that golden-clear *vino di Capri*. He was so sorry she had had no supper. It was a shame that she had come to his house merely to be starved; perhaps she would never come again, after such treatment? Some fruit, then, just to show that she had not been quite neglected? Not a slice of pine-apple, nor half a dozen grapes, even? Some strawberries, then?

'Grapes and strawberries in the middle of March?' she said, with a smile. 'Really, it is perfectly wicked.'

And then there was on his lips some wild reference to Ser Federigo's envied happiness in the destruction of his falcon, but fortunately he did not go so far; he contented himself with engrossing her attention so that she could not see any of the conjuring; and he would have her tell him more of her experiences among the mudlarks down Lambeth way. Were they all so cynical? And not so grateful to her as they might be? Was she not afraid of having her

pocket picked? And the one of them who was her champion and chief confidant—could he be found out now, by a stranger? Would he like to have a good, substantial, mid-day dinner given him, and thereafter a boat that he might sail on the ponds in Battersea Park, supposing that such an amusement were permitted?

Well, Sabina had a generous faculty of being pleased with whoever was talking to her for the moment; and he was her host, moreover, and all the others were occupied with their own affairs; so she had leisure to tell him about these and other things. And ever the glamour of her clear soft hazel eyes was working him further and further woe. Her rounded white arms were near him; the dimple in her cheek showed when she laughed; her beautiful brown hair was still more beautiful in the softened light. But these things were as nothing. It was her eyes he sought; and these were so friendly, and pleased, and benignant that who would have accused them of working him woe? Nor did he care. He drank the sweet madness, the fell poison, without stint, and recklessly and joyously; this night was to be at least one happy night in his life; he had Sabie all to himself—and he was drinking in her pleased glances and her smiles as if they were strong wine; the years to come, whatever there might be in them, could never deprive him of that gold-and-rose-tinted memory.

At length the conjuring came to an end; and it was Herr Borella himself who suggested that they should go away into the studio to have a little music; he had to leave soon, he explained. And then there was a fetching of wraps for the womenfolk; and somehow Walter Lindsay managed to secure Sabina's long fur cloak; and he it was who put it round her shoulders, and would even insist that it was properly fastened at the throat, for the night was cold. When they went outside into the back garden, at the farther end of which was the studio, they found that the night skies had grown clearer, and stars were shining palely overhead. Sabina thought of the dark early morning in East London, and of her crossing from the nurses' dormitory to the wards; she was a little grave as the ghostlike procession passed along from the house, through

this weird gloom, to the yellow light of the studio-door.

All within there, however, was brightness; the gas and candles lit; the fire burning briskly; the piano open; plenty of music scattered everywhere. The great baritone set to work at once; he was frank enough. He sang them 'O du, mein holder Abendstern' from *Tannhäuser*—a young lady in spectacles accompanying him; and then he himself sat down at the piano, and sang—

'Fern in die Welt,
Weit, weit von dir,
Strahlet dein Bild
Tief, tief in mir.'

One would scarcely have expected a man who had been so boisterous and uproarious at supper to sing with so much feeling; but the quality of his art was very fine indeed; more than one young woman there was rather lumpy about the throat when he finished. Then, after he had sung one or two more things, and bade such as he knew good-night, and lit a big cigar, and gone away, the young folks began on their own account; and as there happened to be lying open a volume of old-fashioned glees and madrigals and duets, they were soon in the midst of these. It was a careless, happy-go-lucky series of performances; when they broke down, they turned over the page to the next one; sometimes a newcomer would stroll over and give them a helping hand. But the young lady in spectacles knew her business, at all events; and so in one way or another they got along, with laughter and jests thrown in. Now it was 'Foresters, sound the cheerful horn,' or 'The chough and crow to roost are gone,' or 'Hark, the bonny Christ Church bells,' or 'Here's a health to all good lasses,' and again it was 'Chloe found Amyntas lying,' or

'Sigh no more, ladies; ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever.'

All this while Walter Lindsay was seated on a sofa with Sabina as his sole companion. On coming into the studio he had perforce paid a little attention to his other guests;

but once he had got them fairly started on this occupation, he had gone back to her—how could he help it? And Sabina sat and listened, her hands folded, her eyes pleased; she had the air of one looking on, rather than of one participating; but surely it was with no unkindly regard.

'How pretty that is!' she said, rather wistfully, on one occasion.

The tall young Associate was at the piano; and it was his neighbour at supper who had now taken the place of the spectacled young lady; and he was bending over the accompanist, so that their heads were very near together—his a fair chestnut-brown, hers a raven-black. And they were singing—with a careless bass thrown in by a gentleman standing opposite the fire—

'Tell me, shepherds, have you seen
My Flora pass this way.'

'Yes, it is a pretty air,' Walter Lindsay said.

'Ah, but I did not mean that,' Sabina said, in her low voice. 'It is the picture that looks so pretty—the two young people together, and singing——'

And why, asked Lindsay of himself, should she look and speak so wistfully? Was she not herself young and more beautiful than any? Was she to be for ever a spectator? Did she regard herself as one cut off from the amusements, the associations, the hopes of young people? And where was the need of any such sacrifice?

'*Tell me*,' warbled the young lady at the piano—'*Tell me!*' roared the basso at the fireplace—'*Shepherds, have you seen*,' struck in the young Associate, who had a very fair tenor voice; but Lindsay did not heed them; he was thinking of Sabina, and of her way of life, and of her future. And if he was bold enough to consider how easy it would be for her to give him one of those forget-me-nots? Well, if that wild fancy crossed his mind, it was but for a moment. He was far away from that, and he knew it. But why should he fret? Sabina was here, and by his side; and she was bland and smiling and kind; and ever he drank fresh draughts of bewildering gladness and madness from the shining beauty of her eyes.

By this time the black-haired maiden at the piano had had enough of duets and glees.

'Go and get up a dance,' she said, in her imperative way, to her companion; and as the young painter dutifully obeyed, she began to play the slow and gracious music of a minuet. However, it was no minuet that was in the young lady's mind. She only wished in that way to introduce the idea of dancing. As soon as the easels and chairs and couches had been removed, and the young men were choosing their partners, she started off with 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' and that at a rattling pace.

'Will you join them?' Walter Lindsay said to his companion.

'I think I would rather look on,' Sabina answered.

'Then give me the dance, and we will sit it out together,' said he.

She nodded and smiled; that was more to her liking.

'Will you give me them all on the same terms?' said he quickly. 'I don't wish to dance.'

But she did not answer this; she was looking on with interest at the formation of the two long lines.

And so Lindsay and this fell enchantress were left together again; and, as the wild romp in the middle of the floor went on, he was telling her all about his work and his plans for the summer (in answer to her questions, of course), and he was describing to her the secret sylvan haunts he knew, and the remote little inns he stayed at, and so forth; and as all this naturally led up to his drawings and sketches, he took her away into a corner to show her a big portfolio of these. And meanwhile he was forming a dark design in his brain. When the 'Sir Roger de Coverley' ended, he withdrew from her side for a moment.

'Percy,' he said to the tall young painter, 'get up a cotillon.'

'Don't know how.'

'Oh yes, you do,' was the hurried rejoinder. 'Anybody will show you. Do, like a good fellow—and look sharp!'

And then he was back at her side again. Now, in the corner where the portfolio was, there stood a triangular Chippendale cabinet, filled with various kinds of *bric-à-brac*,

and amongst these—and the gem of the collection—was a small chalice of rock-crystal, elaborately studded round with uncut stones of diverse colours. In itself it was a most beautiful thing; besides which it was obviously of great age and value. Sabina was looking in at these shelves with a woman's curiosity.

'Do you know what that dance is?' he asked of her.

She glanced over her shoulder carelessly.

'No.'

'It is a cotillon,' said he, rather breathlessly. 'And you gave it me, you know.'

'Did I?' said she, with something of an amused look; what could it matter whether she had made this useless promise or not?

'Oh yes, you did,' he said eagerly. 'We are in it, if we choose. And do you know what the peculiarity of this dance is?—that you are allowed to make your partner a little present. Oh, I assure you it is so—and—and this is what I want you to accept from me.'

He opened the cabinet, and took out the jewel-bestudded wine-cup. Sabina rather shrank back.

'Oh no, oh no,' she said. 'You are very kind—but—but I have no place to keep such things—besides, I could not take it—Mr. Lindsay, please be good enough not to ask me.'

Her eyes were earnest; and they could make him do anything. But he was unsatisfied and anxious and a little bit reckless, perhaps.

'Then, if you will not take, will you give?' he made bold to say, but under his breath. 'Miss Janie says that is more in your way. And if I ask a favour of you? You will not take this little cup: well, you could make it thirty times more valuable to me if you would drink something out of it. Will you?'

She looked surprised, but not offended; she did not quite understand.

'Why, what difference will that make?' she said. But before she had finished the words he had gone away over to a little *buffet* that Mrs. Wygram was improvising for the dancers, and the next moment he had returned with a

bottle of wine in his hand. He poured a little of the foaming fluid into the chalice, and offered it to her.

'Is it a ceremony?' Sabina asked, with a smile, and she took the chalice from him.

'Yes, it is part of the dance,' he answered, glad of any excuse that would obtain for him this gracious favour.

'Do I say anything? Do I wish anything?' Sabina asked.

'I will do the wishing,' he answered quickly; and then she raised the wine-cup to her lips, and drank a little, and then gave it back to him. He could only look his thanks.

Mrs. Wygram's eyes had followed him across the room.

'And what do you think of your Sabie now?' she exclaimed to her daughter, who was assisting her.

'Just the same as ever—why?' was Janie's answer.

'You did not see what she did just now?'

'No.'

'Well, then, I'll tell you; she drank out of that crystal wine-cup just to please him, I suppose, and he put it back in the cabinet!'

'And why shouldn't she?' said Janie bravely. 'To please him?—very well. She would do that or anything else to please any man, woman, or child who happened to be there. Mother, what has set you all of a sudden against Sabie? You know it's just her universal kindness.'

'Kindness!' said the mother, with a gentle sarcasm. 'Perhaps it is. But I have never seen a more abominable piece of flirtation in all my born days.' And with that she went to bid the model-butler bring some more lemonade and seltzer water; for the young lady at the piano had begun to play a wild Highland schottische, and Mrs. Wygram had enough experience of these scratch parties to know what that meant.

They kept up the merry-making to a very early hour indeed; but after Sabina and the Wygrams had taken their departure, Lindsay did not seem to heed much what was going forward. And at last he was left alone—in this big studio—with the *disjecta membra* of the revels all around him; and he sat him down to think over everything that had happened during that eventful evening, even to

the smallest details wherever Sabina had been concerned.

And so Ser Federigo had not sacrificed his falcon after all—though his offer of the jewelled chalice was a little tentative effort in that direction. No; so far from his being poorer by her coming to his house, he was ever so much the richer; that was like Sabina, as the faithful Janie would have maintained. The whole of this big studio seemed saturated with the charm and wonder of her presence. Here she had sat, her hands folded in her lap, talking to him in her softly-modulated voice; there she had stood, her beautiful neck bent over the drawings and sketches, her praise and admiration frank and ready enough; it was by the side of that easel she had taken the wine-cup—now a hundred times more precious to him than it had been before—into her gentle hand, and raised it, and touched the rim with her proudly-cut lips, and given it him back with so gracious a smile. He was beginning to understand her now. If you said, 'Take!' her answer was 'No;' if you said 'Give!' her answer was 'Yes.' But all through these visions and recalling of visions it was her eyes that chiefly he saw; and they were regarding him somehow; and always they were pleased and generous and benignant towards him. He made no effort to banish the memory of that look.

CHAPTER VI

TO BRIGHTON

SABINA was unused to late hours and late suppers. Next morning she found herself less brisk than was her wont; and so, having despatched Janie Wygram on certain errands down in the Chelsea direction, she thought she would take a longer walk than usual, and go round by Hyde Park on her way to Lancaster Gate. And very soon the fresh air revived her. It was one of those sudden springlike days that occasionally show themselves in March; a bland south wind was blowing; the Serpentine was shimmering in silver; the pale brown roads dividing the level breadths of greensward looked pleasant enough in the warm sunlight; and every leafless branch of the elms and maples was defined sharp and black against the blue sky. There was a kind of happy murmur all around, and a look of life and animation amongst the nondescript crowd. Carriages rolled by with their occupants wrapped in their winter furs; nursemaids were chatting as they pushed before them the somnolent perambulator; charming young horsewomen were walking side by side, and perchance exchanging confidences about the last night's ball; children were calling, dogs scampering, sparrows twittering; everywhere there was life and motion and sound—and it was a sound as of gladness, somehow.

And, of course, Sabina thought of the poor young fellow who was shut out from all this, and kept a close prisoner there; and her heart was filled with pity for him; and half-unconsciously she walked as quickly as she could, so as to give him as soon as possible the solace of her companionship. It is true—though she did not like to confess it to

herself—that she had begun to suspect of late that he was not quite so grateful for her society, and her efforts to amuse him, as he might be. He seemed to be very well content with the sporting papers, and with the less officious conversation of the professional nurse. Perhaps, then, she —that is, Sabina—bored him somewhat? Perhaps he did not want to be bothered with the formality of talking to a young lady? Perhaps he might even consider her a little bit of a nuisance? Sabina did not like to dwell on these questions, because they sounded like pique; and, of course, it did not matter to her whether he was grateful for her volunteered companionship or not.

On this morning she found him in very gay spirits indeed; a number of things contributing. First of all, Schiller had won the Shipley Hall Handicap on the previous Tuesday, and Mr. Fred Foster was now in ample funds; but this she knew, for she had been the gainer by that victory of ten pounds. Then, again, the horse that he had backed for the Lincolnshire Handicap, at 20 to 1 against, had quite suddenly risen in popular estimation and was now first favourite at 100 to 12; and here was a fine opportunity for a little business! But the chief and glorious news was that the doctor had consented to his removal; and arrangements were now being made for his being conveyed to Brighton.

'Do you know Brighton, Miss Zembra?' he said eagerly. 'Oh, I do, I can tell you; I know it just down to the ground. I shan't want for amusement. You see, I'll have rooms in the King's Road; they shouldn't be very expensive at this time of the year; and I can be wheeled out to the end of the West Pier like the other cripples, and read the papers, and listen to the band. Then there's a telegraph-office at the foot of the Pier if one wants to do a little business. Then there's the tennis court; they'll let me look on, I suppose. Then the billiard-rooms; but I suppose they wouldn't like my hearse brought in there. When I can sport about in a bath-chair, however, I know one shop where I shall be welcome enough. And, then, the fellows I know are always running down to Brighton—to the Old Ship; I should hear what was going on; they won't leave

me out in the cold. I'm not likely to be tempted like the ordinary stay-at-home backer, to try a system——'

'A system?' she said with inquiring eyebrows.

'Well, a system is a machine for making it certain that you drop your money—that's all,' he explained. 'But why should I bore you with such things—you don't understand. And you seem a little bit tired this morning, Miss Zembra.'

She told him something of the festivities of the night before; and said that though they were mild enough, she was not used to them, and confessed to being a trifle fagged.

'That kind of thing would not suit me at all,' he said frankly. 'I like to keep myself fit all the way round—fit for a steeplechase course, or a thousand up at billiards, or a pigeon-shoot, or anything. Now, I'll tell you the kind of feast I like—a breakfast at Jem Saker's—Saker, the trainer, you know. Well, now, that is the prettiest thing that I have any acquaintance with; Mrs. Saker, buxom and fresh as a daisy, at the head of the table; an excellent breakfast; fried soles done to a turn; bacon crisp and hot from the fender, a devilled kidney or two, and the best coffee in the world. Then, as you're forging ahead, you may chance to glance out of the window, and there is a string of horses marching past on their way to the heath; and just as like as not you'll hear Mrs. Saker say, "Well, I for one don't object to seeing the touts coming about; it shows they think we have some horses worth watching." After a breakfast like that, I'm fit for the day; I can do without anything else all day long; there's never any "sinking" bothers me.'

'You ought to be very thankful you have such a constitution,' Sabina said; she could not help noticing the clearness of his complexion, where the sun-tan still lingered, and also the brilliant liquidness of his eyes, which were like those of a schoolboy in the briskest of health.

'It's just luck,' said he in his usual saturnine fashion. 'I happened to be born like that! I might have been one of those miserable devils who can't go on for a couple of hours without a sherry and bitters. I don't blame them, but I'd rather be as I am.'

'And when do you go to Brighton?' Sabina asked; it occurred to her then that the house would become strangely empty and uninteresting when he was gone.

'As soon as my *catafalque* is got ready,' he said with cheerful good humour. 'And I shall be precious glad to get there. Not entirely on my own account—I'm afraid you must think me an awfully selfish brute, don't you?—no, it's partly on account of the Mater. You see, as soon as I can date my letters from Brighton, she will be convinced that nothing very serious has happened. I have been mortally afraid of the old lady turning up in London, and getting alarmed when she found I wasn't in Bury Street. As for my father, I suppose he's disappointed that I haven't broken my neck. He has been prophesying these dozen years back that that would be the end of me; and people like their prophecies to come off, you know.'

'It has been bad enough as it is,' said Sabina; 'but I am sure you have borne your imprisonment so far with very great courage. Most men would have fretted and complained, and found the forced idleness almost unendurable. I hope you will never have such an experience again; but I must say you make an admirable patient.'

Now, surely, here was an opportunity for him to show himself a little grateful to the young lady who had given him so much of her time and attention. It could have been easily done; nay, was there not almost an invitation in what she had said? But he did not seem to take it that way. He humorously remarked that he hoped soon to be about again, but that he would take care not to challenge John Roberts junior to play 3000 up for a considerable time to come.

There were one or two questions of some delicacy arose ere he could take his departure for Brighton.

'You know, Miss Zembra,' he said, in his usual matter-of-fact way, 'I am quite aware that your people have wished me at Jericho ever since I came into the house; and I don't want to be indebted to people who wish me at Jericho; at the same time I should be sorry to offend you by offering to pay for my board.'

'Please, we will not speak of it,' said Sabina.

'It's an awkward time of the year—if I could send them some game——'

He saw that he only vexed her, and he dropped the subject; privately reserving to himself the right of bountifully tipping the servants, for he was in ample funds at the moment.

Sabina, on her side, found herself quite unable to induce either her father or Lady Zembra to say a word of farewell to their unbidden and unwelcome guest. She represented to them what a gross discourtesy their omitting to do so would be to a man who was distinctly a gentleman; and that even common humanity demanded that they should be well-disposed to one who had suffered injury through a member of the family. But no; Sir Anthony, when he had said a thing stuck to it; and he had declared he would have nothing whatsoever to do with this stranger; and Lady Zembra was only too glad to escape from bother by following the example of her lord. Sabina tried to make some little explanation and apology to Mr. Fred Foster himself; but that young gentleman only laughed good-naturedly, said he understood the whole situation, and that, in their position, he would have been precisely in the same state of mind.

Both Janie Wygram and Sabina went to Victoria Station to see him off; and then it was that Janie saw him for the first time.

'He does not seem much of an invalid,' said Janie, aside, observing his sun-browned complexion and clear blue eyes.

'Poor fellow,' Sabina said; 'just imagine what it must be for one who has led so active a life to be chained down like that. And the doctor says it may be months before he can walk about. I have never seen any one so patient and cheerful.'

'I should have thought he was quick-tempered by the colour of his hair; carroty curls always go with a short temper,' said Janie, who had not forgotten her grudge against this luckless young man.

However, Sabina did not reply to this remark; for she had to step into the carriage to bid Mr. Foster good-bye.

'You won't forget to let me know how you get on at Brighton?' said she.

'Why should I bother you?' he said.

'But I particularly wish to know, and as often as it is convenient,' she persisted. 'You can't imagine how glad I shall be when I hear that you are getting about again, and shaking off the last traces of that dreadful accident.'

'Oh, very well,' said he. 'But don't you bother about me. I shall soon be skipping about again like a two-year-old.'

'Good-bye,' she said, and she gave him her hand.

'Good-bye, Miss Zembra,' said he, and he added, 'you know you've been awfully kind to me. I wish I knew how to repay you. If you were a man, I could.'

'Indeed!' she said lightly, for she guessed there was some small joke in his mind.

'Yes, I could. I'd advise you to put every penny you have in the world on Cherry Blossom for the Grand National.'

The train was already moving; she had to step quickly back; and then she waved her hand to him from the platform.

'Poor fellow,' she said, almost to herself; 'half of his cheerfulness is only pretence. He feels it more than he would have any one think.'

And Janie looked at her with a curious glance; then they turned and left the station together, and in silence.

CHAPTER VII

BY THE SHANNON SHORE

For ordinary love-sickness there is no more prompt and efficacious cure than marriage; but for the heart-ache begotten of hopeless love, where is the cure? It is a disease that people are for the most part ashamed of; they conceal it assiduously; and therefore it may be assumed to be more prevalent than appears. Walter Lindsay, at all events, could find no cure, though he tried many. For he was inordinately vexed with himself that in walking along High Street, Kensington, he could not see a tall woman in the distance without his heart leaping up with some wild hope that it might be Sabina. And why, each time that he went home, was there a great disappointment for him on finding there no letter from Janie Wygram, with some chance mention of Sabina in it? Janie Wygram could not keep continually writing to him *à propos* of nothing. The most serious interests of his life were interfered with by this agony of vague unrest; his work was done now, not for the world, that was willing enough to welcome it, but that it might perchance win for him a smile of Sabina's approval. And as for the hopelessness of his passion—well, he had not studied her every gesture and look, he had not listened to Janie's minute and intimate description of her ways of life, and her hopes, and opinions, and interests, all for nothing; and well he knew that marriage formed no part of Sabina's plans for the future. She was very kind to him—for she was kind to everybody; and if he were ill, he thought she might be sorry; and for the passing hour—as had happened the

other evening—she would smile on him, and be generous, and gracious, and bland. But as for anything more? He knew he might as well think of going into the National Gallery and asking some fair-browed Madonna to step down from her frame, and take his hand, and go through the years of life with him.

And then he would try to argue himself out of this insanity of love. He had set up an impossible ideal, he maintained to himself. No woman could be so fine as that. Why should he bother his head about a phantom of his own creation? Women were women; he knew what they themselves said and wrote of each other; he was no longer a boy, imagining everything that wore a petticoat to be an angel. And then he would resolve to go again to Janie Wygram, and get to know something about the real Sabina, who must have her faults and weaknesses and vanities like other folk. Alas! that was not of much avail. Janie quietly remarked that people might say what they liked about women in general; it was none of her business; but she knew what Sabina was; nay, more, she did not scruple to declare to him, as she had already declared to her mother, that were she a man, she would consider herself a fool if she were not in love with Sabie. And so there was no hope for him that way either (not that he was so anxious to dethrone his idol, as he tried to persuade himself that he was); and as Sabina haunted every moment of his life, and came between his every occupation and project and fancy, he began to think that something must be done. He would go away from this hateful Kensington and see whether some of this love-sickness could not be left behind. He would seek out one of his favourite solitudes, and bury himself in that secret place, and devote himself to assiduous work, or assiduous recreation, he cared not which. To leave London—to miss the chance of catching a glimpse of her—to miss the chance even of hearing her name mentioned in the talking of friends—was not pleasant; but to remain in London suffering this useless torture was intolerable. So one morning, and on a sudden impulse, he telegraphed over to a friend in the west of Ireland, asking whether a place could be found

for him on a certain stretch of the Shannon; the answer bade him come forthwith; and that afternoon he packed up his sketching implements and fishing-rods, went down by the night-mail to Holyhead, and was in Dublin in the morning.

He had come either to work or to play; there were to be no more foolish love-fancies. And so, as he sat in that railway carriage hour after hour, and was taken away across Ireland, he kept studying the ever-varying and yet monotonous features of the landscape, and the slowly-changing effects of light. And lucky it was for him that he was a painter. Anybody else would have found that solitary journey a somewhat dismal thing, and the melancholy April day not a little depressing. The leafless trees looked black and harsh amid the raw reds and greens of ploughed land and fallow; and the long stretches of bog, with here and there a few cottages and stone walls and miserable enclosures, were not very cheerful under these cold and neutral-tinted skies. That is to say, the ordinary traveller would have found those skies neutral-tinted and characterless enough; but this man was a painter; and he could find quite sufficient technical interest in regarding the softly-shaded bulk and retreating perspective of the larger masses of cloud, and in tracing here and there a tinge of golden-white among the pale, hopeless, and yet pearly and ethereal blues and grays. And, during all this observation and studying of forms and tones and 'values,' he was determined that his heart should not go away wandering back to Kensington Square and Sabina Zembra.

In the afternoon he reached his destination, a straggling little town on the banks of the Shannon, the swift-rushing waters of which noble river are here spanned by a long and many-arched bridge. He had telegraphed for rooms to the inn, where he was well known; and having deposited his things there, and picked out a handy little trout rod, he walked down to the river to have an hour's careless fishing and a general look round. This was a picturesque neighbourhood into which he had come; but the afternoon was not favourable; what wind there was was easterly, and that had drank the colour out of the hills around, that loomed

high and lurid as mountains through the mist. However, there was always the magnificent river, with its surging rapid masses of white-tipped waves, and the pleasant sound of the rushing over the weir; while eventually a sort of coppery-red sunset broke through the pall of gray. But he was anxious about neither painting nor fishing on this first evening; and so he idly walked back to the inn again and to dinner in the small sitting-room, where the faithful Nora had not forgotten to build for him a big fire of turf instead of coal.

This Nora was an old friend of his; and as she came and went during dinner they had a little talking together. She was a large-limbed creature of a lass, with pretty soft eyes, and black hair that might have been more tidily kept, and hands that might have been more frequently washed. But she was friendly, and obliging, and pleasant-mannered; and her amiable disposition towards the young English artist was manifested in a hundred little ways. She it was who never neglected to fill his flask before he started in the morning; and she was the last to wish him good luck as he left; and she sent him very nice things for lunch; and she was the first to congratulate him if the men appeared in the evening bringing a big salmon, or perhaps two, or perhaps three, with them; and when he came home empty-handed the pretty Nora would say, almost with tears in her voice, 'Well, it's sorry I am, sir; what a shame ye didn't get nothin' all the day long.' *Alanna machree* he called her, and *Mavourneen*, and *Nora astore*, and a great many other things of the meaning of which he knew very little. But Nora took all these with a placid good humour, and her friendliness was always perfectly within bounds.

'Sure, sir,' she said to him this evening, as he was getting to the end of his dinner, 'it's manny's the time we've been thinking you'd be bringing Mrs. Lindsay over wid ye, sir.'

'If you wait for that day, you'll wait all your life, Nora, my darling,' he answered.

'Ah, don't say that, sir!' responded Nora cheerfully. 'Sure there's plenty of pretty young ladies in London.'

'I suppose there are,' said he.

And instantly something in his manner told the sharp-witted Nora that she had struck a wrong chord, and she quickly changed the subject.

'Will ye have any pudding, sir?' she asked; here she could not go wrong.

'What kind of a pudding is it, Nora?'

''Tis an apple-poy, sir.'

'Oh yes, that'll do.'

And it may have fancifully occurred to him in his idle musings, as this gentle-mannered handmaiden came and went, that if Nora were only to brush her hair and wash her hands, and get nicely dressed and smartened up, she would make a very presentable bride; and what if he were to induce her to go away to America—to the west, where he would buy a farm, and they would lead a healthy, happy, matter-of-fact existence—so that he should forget his sorrows, and think of that hated Kensington no more? But no; that would not do either. He might not find the forgetfulness he was in search of. Besides, her hair—each time she came into the room he noticed it—was too dreadfully untidy. And, then again, it was just possible that the Lass of Limerick (this was another of the names he gave her) might not care to go.

By and by, when Nora had removed the dinner things, and brought him some coffee, and stirred up the peats, he was left quite alone, and he pulled in his chair to the blazing fire, and lit his pipe. So far he had done well. He had scarcely sent one backward thought towards London the whole day long. But now there was this to be considered. He had promised to paint for Sabina a replica of the water-colour drawing she had chanced to admire; and he had understood from Janie that Miss Zembra was willing to accept the same. But replicas were more or less mechanical things; besides, he had not the drawing here. Would it not be better, before setting seriously to work, that he should do some sketch for her—of some actual living scene? A first fresh impression was always preferable. She had shown a little interest in asking him about the various remote corners that he went to; here was one. Would she care for a sketch of the wide waters of

the Shannon, the long bridge, the little straggling town, the old square-towered church, and, overlooking all, the distant slopes and shoulders of the Slieve Bernagh hills? It would not be recalling him to her recollection; it would be redeeming a promise. And might he not write to Janie—now—and make the suggestion?

It was a pretty long letter that he wrote to Janie. And if at first he pretended that all his concern was about that picture arrangement, in the end he was quite candid, and even glad to make Janie once more his confidante.

'The truth is,' he wrote, 'I came here to try to shake off certain influences—or rather, one particular influence—that you are aware of, I daresay. And to you, who see so much of Miss Zembra, and know what she is, I am not ashamed to confess that it may be difficult; but I hope to succeed in the end; and then, when this glamour of fascination has been got rid of, I hope to meet her on the more durable basis of friendship, if she will permit of that. Of course a young woman, and especially a beautiful young woman, may naturally distrust any such proposal; but if ever the need should arise, she would find that it was no fair-weather friendship I had begged her to accept. It would not be merely while her physical beauty lasted that I should be at her service, at any moment, if trouble came. To me, Sabina (I may call her this in confidence, and you will burn this letter) will always be beautiful, even when her eyes have lost that lustre that at present is just a little too bewildering for some unhappy mortals. You have helped me to understand what this is; and the friendship of such a splendid creature would mean more to me than I can well tell you. I suppose nothing else is possible. You say so; and you ought to know. At the same time, I am aware that you don't wish her to marry anybody; and that, if it were a matter of advice, that is the advice you would give her. Now, let me warn you, dear Miss Janie, that you have not seen very much of the world; and that to give advice in such a serious matter to any one involves a grave responsibility. It is all very well just now. Sabina is young and vigorous, self-confident in the audacity of her health and good spirits, and happy enough in shedding the

bounty of her generous disposition upon all comers. But it cannot be always so. She cannot be always so. She might want a helping hand; she is away from her family; sickness might overtake her; she might get robbed of her good looks—which are an easy passport just now to everybody's favour. In any case, she must inevitably grow old. Is it wise to ask such a woman to face the coming years alone? You know better than any one how sensitive she is, though she pretends not to be; how eager she is that people should like her; how she seems to crave for sympathy and affection. Well, I'm not going to rave about her any more, for you would think it was all special pleading; but you just be careful, dear Miss Janie, not to do any mischief where the lifelong interests of your best and dearest friend are concerned. If she will go that way, it is well. Each human being has his or her own ideal, I suppose. And anyhow, I'm going to try to banish all this mystification and glamour out of my head; and when I come back to London, I hope to be able to understand what Sabina really is—and no doubt she is a great deal finer than any of my imaginings about her; and you will help us to become good, true friends, and so make a satisfactory end of the whole matter. And I'm going to send your mother a salmon, as soon as I catch one.'

It was a very sensible letter, to be written by a man whose brains had got so thoroughly bewildered; and no doubt at the moment he believed every word he had written. But as he sat there later on, staring into the fire, perhaps some other visions may have arisen before him—only, it is not necessary they should be put down here.

Next morning he was all alert; the boatmen were waiting outside; the long Castle Connel rods had been put together; Nora had filled his flask—just in case there might be occasion to drink 'a tight line to your honour;' and, presently, when he had bundled his sketching implements together, they were all on their way down to the boat. This was a very excellent recreation for a landscape painter (as well he knew before); for when once the coble, or 'cot,' was out in the midst of the wild-whirling waters,

the men not only managed that, but the fishing as well; trolling—'dragging,' as they called it—with prawn and 'killoch' and phantom minnow, or lashing the stream with a forty-yard line, and a big gold and red and purple Shannon fly, as the occasion demanded; while he, if he chose, could sit idle, studying effects of light and colour and form, or jotting these down in his book, when he was so inclined. And then again, when the light was bad, or the part of the river they happened to be at uninteresting, he would get up and take the casting rod and have a turn at the throwing; and if the forty yards were now reduced to twenty-five, still that was not a bad line for an amateur to throw out clean. On this particular morning he was less interested in the fishing than usual; all his concern was to find something fine for the sketch he was to send Sabina. And how would that do, now? The built-up bank all ablaze with golden gorse; above that a row of leafless trees against a sky of pale lurid blues and faint red-grays; and underneath the bank, and all in front of him, the rushing, boiling, surging river, here and there straight, swift rapids, here and there masses of foam-crested waves, and here and there a large, circular eddy of black, oily-looking smooth water, on which were reflected, in wan and spectral fashion, the whitewashed walls of an old, dilapidated mill. He looked at it again, this way and that, but it would not do. The east wind had withered the colour out of the landscape; this furious river was too difficult for a mere sketch; he wanted a blue sky on the water, instead of those reflections of gray and black. So he gave that up for the present, and took the rod from Johnnie Ryan, and began to belabour the whirling currents with five and twenty yards of line and a big 'silver doctor.'

In the afternoon he was more fortunate. For although that weird haze still hung over the lurid blue hills and the ghostly landscape, and the sun, when the clouds slowly parted, showed himself a sphere of mottled dusky gold, by and by, as the evening drew on, a beautiful pinky-gray light began to shine in the western heavens; and the stems and branches and twigs of the leafless trees grew to be of a rich warm purple; and the dark green of the grass on the

bank and the deep yellow of the gorse became strangely intense and clear.

'Put me ashore now, Johnnie,' he said to the chief boatman.

'Sure 'tis the best bit of the bate we're just coming to,' Johnnie remonstrated.

'Very well; you fire away, and pick up a forty pounder. I'm going ashore—look alive now!'

And perhaps he was a little anxious as he began, and half-forgetful of his own mastery of his craft. He was so anxious to justify himself in Sabina's eyes. She had not seen much of his work; nor had any one in fact. His Wigtonshire patrimony had relieved him from the necessity of labouring for the market; and his reputation, which was distinct and marked, prevailed chiefly among artists themselves, who were wont to become very enthusiastic indeed about Walter Lindsay's drawings. Of course there were those who decried his method, and called him an Impressionist, and the like. And he was an Impressionist of a kind; but his Impressionism was of the higher order that refuses to deal with that which is unnecessary, not the Impressionism which is chiefly marked by a clever avoidance of difficulties. He began by being a realist of the severest type; for years he had laboured in Switzerland, in Sweden, in Holland at patient and faithful studies of rocks and foliage and water and sky; but gradually he had emancipated himself. Nature was no longer his master and tyrant; he chose for himself; he left undone what he did not think worth doing; but what he did do was done with the reverence born of knowledge. Nature was his friend and companion, if no longer his master; and hitherto he had been well content to wander away by himself into any kind of a solitude, working sometimes, idling sometimes, but always more or less unconsciously studying; and if he was not scrupulous about detail, where he did put in detail it was right. He was none the worse a painter that he was also a trained geologist, and that his herbarium was of his own collection, and bore record of many a toilsome pilgrimage.

And now he began to pick up his courage again, for the

effect proved lasting, and he was getting on. The beautiful ethereal rose-grays still dwelt in the higher heavens; the leafless trees grew even warmer in their purple; and the gorse bushes burned gold in the pallid shadow of the bank. He glanced at Johnnie Ryan from time to time; for Johnnie was fighting a salmon farther down the stream, and he wanted to see the end of that struggle. And then he wondered whether Sabina would care for this bit of a sketch. It was not of the chromo-lithographic kind; it was not striking; moreover, a good deal of compromise was necessary even with what was before him. But he thought he could make something out of it ultimately—a tender kind of a thing; not strong in colour, perhaps; rather ethereal and delicate, but if possible luminous and fine. He hoped Sabina would like it. Would she understand the reticence of it? Would she understand what had made him hold his hand somewhat? Of course, he could do the other thing if he chose. But it was something in the nature of a pearl that he wished to give to Sabina.

He carried out the sketch as far as was possible in the circumstances, until the rose hue in the sky began to fade into dusk; and then he bundled up his things, fairly well content. And Johnnie Ryan and his companion had got the salmon—a twenty-two pounder—and they were also well content. He let the two men go on before him; and then, after sitting there a while considering what he could do further with the sketch, and perhaps thinking of one or two other things, he rose and walked slowly home by the river-bank, underneath a twilight made transparent by a single star.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW FRIENDSHIP

Of a sudden all this was changed; for the next morning the wind was blowing freshly from the west; and the world was ablaze with colour—rich and glowing and keen; and from that moment forward every day as it went by was filled to overflowing with brisk work, and recreation quite as brisk. When he had done a sufficient quantity of the former, he fell upon the latter with might and main; and flogged those surging rapids of the Shannon with a persistency and skill that won even the approval of Johnnie Ryan. And the evenings?—well, the evenings were given over now to the glorification of friendship. That was to be the future happiness. He would go back to London cured of the 'cruel madness of love,' and ask that beautiful, high-gifted creature to give him of her companionship, as far as that might be possible. He would prove the faith that was in him too. Others might try to woo and win her; he would be her friend, no matter what befell. He had heard of such things, and the situation might become fine in its way. And so he worked hard, and fished hard, and bade himself be of good cheer; he had banished that morbid love-sickness by main force; Sabina was to be his friend.

There came a large envelope containing a couple of cards for the Private View of the Royal Academy. A week or two previous he had received the honour of an invitation to be present at the Banquet; this was an additional compliment, and highly pleased was he with both. But, of course, his first thought was of Sabina; and as he guessed

that old Mr. Wygram would as usual have received a similar couple of tickets (this was a friendly act on the part of the Academy towards one who was not now as prosperous as once he had been), and as he knew that Mrs. Wygram and Janie invariably made use of these, he at once telegraphed to Miss Janie that he had a card for Miss Zembra if she cared to go, and also begging her to fix the engagement. That meant, naturally, that he should escort the three ladies to Burlington House, and show them round the rooms. But it was all in the way of friendship.

Next morning he said casually to the Lass of Limerick, 'Nora, what do you think now would be a nice present for a young lady?'

'Sure a sweetheart mightn't be amiss, sir,' said Nora demurely, as she was putting the eggs on the table.

'Ah, you're too facetious, Nora, alannah, for one of your tender years. How about a salmon, now? What if I were to send the young lady a salmon?'

'She'd be mighty plased, sir, I suppose,' said Nora, as she was heaping some more turf on the fire.

'But the fish ought to be of my own catching—don't you think so?'

'And maybe it's herself you'd rather be afther, sir, begging your pardon,' said Nora, darting a glance at him from the door.

'Nora,' said he gravely, 'is that the fashion they have of talking in Limerick?'

'It's the fashion they talk all over the wurruld, sir, when a young gentleman spakes about a young lady in that way —and that's the truth, sir,' said Nora, as she smiled maliciously and disappeared into the passage.

He was not to be deterred by the sarcasm of the Pride of Kildare (another of her names, by the way). This was a happy inspiration that he should send a salmon to Sabina. He did not stay to ask himself what she could do with it. Why, it was the right and privilege of every sportsman to make a present of game—salmon, or venison, or grouse, or whatever it might be—to whomsoever he chose, even to a stranger. Sabina would have the compliment; the Wygrams would have the fish. And surely this noble river, that he

had made friends with, that he had come to know so well, that he had formed so great an affection for, would yield him a worthy prize? Anyhow, his colours, and block, and camp-stool, and sketching-umbrella were all left unheeded in a corner; and he was busy with minnows and prawns and 'Jock Scotts' and 'Blue Doctors;' and forthwith he was on his way down to the coble with Johnnie Ryan and his mate.

And what a day this was for idleness, whether afloat or ashore! The spring seemed to have come upon them with a bound. The lilac and silver-white April skies were filled with blowing clouds; and now there were dazzling floods of light, and again the gloom of a passing shower; the yellow gorse burned hot in the sun; there were blush-tinted anemones in the leafless woods, and primroses everywhere, and shy violets; the swallows were skimming, and dipping, and twittering. A robin sang loud and clear from the top-most twig of a hawthorn bush. And then the splendid river, changing with every mood of the sky; at times sullen and dark under the heavy rainclouds; and then again, when these had passed, and the heavens were bountifully flooding the world with radiance, this great mass of water became a mighty highway of flashing, vivid, intense cobalt blue, lying between these soft green meadows and that high bank crowned with its golden furze.

'We ought to get a fish to-day, Johnnie,' he said, as he was flogging away at the water.

'Bedad, and it's more than one we'll have before going home this night, your honour,' was Johnnie's confident answer.

Moreover, the prophecy came true, for that evening, as they went home through the dusk, the men had three very nice fish to carry, one of them weighing twenty-eight pounds; and it was the twenty-eight pounder, of course, that was to go to Kensington Square.

A twenty-eight pound salmon, a ticket for the Private View of the Academy, a water-colour drawing of a rose-gray evening over the beautiful river: these were the gifts he now had for Sabina; but they were not to show her that he was continually thinking of her; they were not to beg

for her favour in any way; they were merely to cement the new friendship. All the same, he began to wonder why Janie had not written. He watched the posts. He tormented himself with doubts. Perhaps he had been too bold. Perhaps Sabina was ill. To think of her—while here he was in this blowing April weather, with the spring flowers carpeting the wood, and the west winds redolent of the full-blossomed gorse, and the great river shining back the deep blue of the young year's skies—to think of her as perchance in a dull room in that gray Kensington Square, lying pale and wan, it might be, with white fingers limp on the coverlet! Why was he not in London, that he might go straight to Janie and ask? If Sabina were ill, however slightly, small messages from the outside world might vary the monotony of the sick-room—flowers, and fruit, and books, and an occasional word of remembrance and sympathy—these could do no harm. Then again he would argue himself out of this fear. Sabina was very busy. Janie, too, had many things to look after. Perhaps she was waiting to see whether Sabina could definitely fix about the Private View. Nevertheless, he came downstairs early in the morning lest there should be an envelope waiting for him on the breakfast-table. And sometimes he would leave the fishing just as the evening looked most promising, and wander back to the inn, hoping for an answer from Kensington Square. But all this anxiety, and needless alarm, and torturing speculation had nothing to do with love or love-sickness; it was but part of the newly-established friendship.

Nora was a good-hearted lass and shrewd withal; and she had got to suspect that Mr. Lindsay was troubling himself about the non-arrival of a letter; so that one day when the afternoon post brought a little batch of correspondence for him, she straightway sought out a small shock-headed boy and sent him down with the parcel to the boat. The letter from Janie had come at last, and eagerly enough it was opened. She apologised for not having answered sooner; but said she had been extremely busy. The young gentleman who had met with the accident had left Lancaster Gate; following that, Sabina had many arrears of her own

particular work to attack, and Janie had been helping her. And as he read on remorse of conscience struck him. It appeared that his letter had very much distressed this tender soul. Any charge, however slight or remote, against her beloved Sabie, was a cause of deep concern to her; and she had got it into her head that Mr. Lindsay was rather hinting that Sabina was impervious to the claims of friendship; and she considered this to be most especially ungrateful on his part.

'Don't think me impertinent, dear Mr. Lindsay,' she wrote, 'but really I cannot help asking what you would like more. You write as if you and Sabie were strangers; that you were coming back to beg for a little friendship from her; and that is all you have to say in return for the way she treated you that night at your house! Why, she just devoted herself to you the whole evening; and had scarcely a word or a look for any one else—so much so that it was remarked; and was as kind to you as an unmarried girl could be. I think you want a little too much, if I must speak my mind. If you think that Sabie is not already your friend, I can only say that you are *very much mistaken;* and friendship with Sabie means something. And she is very much interested in your work, as I know; and when I told her where you were, among such beautiful things—well, I confess I was mean enough to say it was lucky for some folk that they could go away and live among green fields and spring flowers and woods and all that, for we were walking through a horrid little lane over in Battersea—she was quite sharp with me, and said it was a very good thing some people *could* go away and bring us back reports of how beautiful the world was, and give us pictures of it that we could look at again and again with delight in the middle of all our troubles and worry. Yes, and she met the President of the Academy at somebody's house the other evening; and he was saying very nice things about you; and she came home and repeated every one of them, and was very much pleased about it; and said how fine a thing it must be for one in your position to have such a career before him, and to have won such esteem already from your own brothers in art. But that isn't friendship—oh no! That

is the carelessness of a stranger. However, I am not going to scold any more, for I don't know that there was not some make-believe in your letter. Only it does seem hard on Sabie. I suppose you don't know how kind she was to you that evening? Or how much attention do you expect, if I may speak frankly? I wondered that none of the other gentlemen were jealous of the way she devoted herself to you, both during supper and in the studio; but I suppose they find girls like Miss Sadleir and Tottie Morrison more attractive? Well, they're welcome, so long as they leave me my Sabie. She told me you had offered her that beautiful old wine-cup, and she thought it was very kind of you; but of course it would be no use to her. Besides, you could not expect her to accept so valuable a gift. Mother, who has very sharp eyes, says that something else happened just about that time. Do you know? Of course, I would not ask Sabie for worlds. But did it happen? That was not friendship, anyway? And yet you seem to think that Sabie is not kind to you.'

He took her scolding manfully; and only wished for more. For it was very grateful to him to have it so hotly argued and proved, by one who ought to know, that Sabina held him in some little regard; and the references to that evening in the studio recalled an abundance of happiness; and he liked to be told that Sabina had shown him so much favour. He read the scolding over and over again, and did not care whether he merited it or not; it was all about Sabina, and that was sufficient. But that chance remark about the lane in Battersea gave him a twinge of conscience. He could see the two girls trudging through those squalid thoroughfares, on their errands of kindness and help, the air fœtid around them, the skies hidden away from them. While as for him, look at his surroundings at this moment! The afternoon happened to be strangely still and peaceful—it was like an evening in summer. On the higher meadows lay a soft and mellow radiance, streaming over from the west; but down here the wide stream was in shadow; and odd enough was the contrast between the turmoil of the water—with its sharp and sudden gleams of blue-black and silver-gray—and that peaceful golden landscape, and the pale

cloudless overarching sky. Here and there a bird was singing; and ever there was the lulling rush of the river, a murmur filling the still evening air. And then he thought of Battersea; and of Sabina; and of her generous defence of him; and all he could say for himself was this: that if any of his transcripts of these peaceful and beautiful scenes on the Shannon had a trace of interest in her eyes, or could make a dull corner of the house in Kensington Square one whit the brighter, she was welcome to her choice of them or to all of them put together.

There was further good news for him in the postscript.

'About the Private View of the Academy,' Miss Wygram wrote, 'Sabie says I am to thank you very much for remembering her, and she will be glad to go with us, if nothing unusual should happen.'

Now here was a notable thing; for though he was neither Academician nor Associate, he would be in a certain sense Sabina's host on this occasion, and responsible for her being pleased and entertained. And what could he do? Was there no special favour he could obtain for her? Numbers of both Academicians and Associates were amongst his most intimate friends; perhaps they could procure for him the use of some small room somewhere, so that Miss Zembra and the little party he might make up could have lunch in peace and quiet, instead of amongst the heated crowd? Failing that (and it did not sound very possible), by going early surely he could secure a table in the refreshment room, in some snug corner? And who could prove himself a better guide to her as she went round the Galleries? For each year he was in the habit of sending in a little water-colour, not to ask for public favour at all, but merely to gain for him a ticket for the Varnishing Day; and he would devote the whole of that day to a rapid survey of the Exhibition; so that when Sabina started on her round of the rooms, he could take her without trouble and exploration to everything worth seeing. On Private View Day, as every one knows, the womenfolk rather let themselves loose in the way of conspicuous attire. And if Sabina should come amongst them in her simple gown of plain brown homespun, with its black buttons and frilled tight cuffs? He hoped she

would. It was the dress he used to look out for in Kensington High Street; it was the dress that used to make his heart leap—before the era of friendship had opened. And better than any extravagance of fashion it seemed to suit the tall and lithe and graceful form.

But for the consideration of these and other high-stirring projects and fancies, he wanted more freedom and the excitement of motion; this coble amid the hurrying waters of the Shannon was all too narrow and confined; so he surrendered his rod to Johnnie Ryan, got put ashore, and presently was walking rapidly along the unfrequented highway in the direction of Lough Derg. And what, he was asking himself, ought he to strive for, in order to prove himself worthy of this rare companionship that was to be his; how was he to win further favour in her eyes? Women, he understood, rather liked the society of famous men—of men who had 'done something,' and who were known to the world. Well, now, he had never striven for fame at all. He had striven to win the appreciation of his brother-artists, and he had succeeded in a most enviable degree; but chiefly, it may be said, he worked for absolute love of the work itself. His Wigtonshire property rendered him independent of the dealers and of any caprice of public fashion; he did his work in his own way; he could afford to linger over it, and produce his best; and the ultimate fate of it, or the effect it would have on his reputation, did not bother him much. But if women liked the society of famous men? Surely there was nothing unworthy in seeking the public approval; in doing something definite; in making his work perhaps a little more consecutive? He was walking near to the Shannon on this placid and golden evening, and it suddenly occurred to him that a series of drawings illustrative of the mighty river from its source away in the north, down to its disappearance in the sea, might show a certain coherence, and appeal to the public with more effect than any mere number of disconnected water-colours. It was a bold project, for the Shannon during its course of two hundred miles flows through almost every kind of country. He would have to face mountain scenery, and lake scenery, and gentle pastoral scenery; and he would

have to deal with the varied character of the river itself, now widening out into such inland seas as Lough Ree and Lough Derg, again gliding swiftly by peaceful meadows, or wildly racing and chasing over the rocky barriers of Castle Connell. But then look at the result of these two or three years' labour: an exhibition room in Piccadilly or King Street—a Private View Day all to himself—Sabina making her appearance, along with the Wygrams, about four in the afternoon—Sabina, as ever, gracious, and benignant, and smiling-eyed.

This newly-formed friendship seemed to demand a good deal of reverie; and it is to be observed that not only did the figure of Sabina loom large and constant in these visions of the future, but also that the society and companionship he was arranging for her was very curiously limited. In fact, there did not appear to be any room for a third or a fourth person. The Wygrams, of course, did not count; they might be regarded merely as attendants upon Sabina; while as for any one else, there was no one else. Sabina and he were to be friends; the outer world—especially the male creatures of the outer world—might surround that distinctly limited circle if they chose—at a little distance. Now, friendship is not ordinarily so exclusive. But perhaps this was an entirely novel kind.

'I'm afraid I'm very late for dinner, Nora, acushla,' said he, as he got back to the inn an hour and a half after the proper time.

'Oh, well, sir,' said Nora good-naturedly, 'we expect the gentlemen to come in at anny toime. If it's bad luck they're having with the fishing they come home, and if it's good luck they stay out. I sent you down your letters, sir.'

'Thank you kindly,' said he.

'I hope there was good news in them, sir,' said Nora, as she was giving the last touch to the turf-fire.

'Indeed, there was,' he rejoined.

'Well, it's glad I am of that, sir,' said Nora, who had been forming her little guesses; 'for sometimes a letter has a dale to say.'

'I am going back to England on Monday.'

'Are ye now, sir? Well, that's a pity, to be sure!—and

Tim O'Connor declaring the weather was going to be splendid for the fishing.'

'Yes, I must be off; but some day or another I'll be coming back. No fear about that; you're too good to me over here.'

'And the next time you come, sir,' said Nora, in her demure way, as she was leaving the room, 'sure, I hope ye'll not be coming alone.'

There was no particular need that he should go back on Monday; but he knew that the art world of London was now entering upon its annual period of excitement; the studios would all be a-murmuring; and the air surcharged with stories of rejections, and rage at the hanging, and wonder at the good luck of some folks in selling their pictures. Of course, he was interested in such things; and it was natural he should return to London at such a time. As for any other reason, or subtle hope, or fascination?—no, he answered himself, there was none. He was quite heart-whole now. Those weeks of hard work and hard exercise and wholesome air on the shores of the Shannon had cured him of that hateful and febrile sadness that had made his life in London unendurable. He was going back to assiduous and happy labour in his studio; and if by chance he were to meet Sabina in the street—down by Kensington Square, it might be, or Hyde Park Gate, or Cromwell Gardens—he would be able to take her hand without a tremor, and she should find nothing but friendship—placid and assured and abiding—in his eyes.

CHAPTER IX

BY THE SEA

BUT in the meantime, Mrs. Wygram had fallen ill in a vague kind of way; lassitude, loss of appetite, and melancholy were the chief symptoms; and Sabina, taking the matter in hand in her rapid and practical fashion, had no difficulty in making a diagnosis of the case. The ailment she declared to be Kensington Square; and the obvious cure —Brighton.

'Janie,' she said, 'I will run down with your mother, and see her put comfortably in a lodging, and stay with her as long as I can. Then you will look after my people from time to time; and if I'm wanted, it's merely a sixpenny telegram and I'm in London in an hour and a quarter. Even if I have to come up now and again, your mother won't feel very lonely when she knows I am coming back in the evening.'

'But why to Brighton, Sabie?' said Janie, with a sudden and jealous alarm.

'I'll tell you the reason—because it is so handy,' was the answer.

'Is Mr. Foster there?'

Sabina's face brightened.

'Yes. Poor fellow, it will be quite a pleasure to see him and try to cheer him up a bit. He is so good-natured, you know, Janie. When one looks back on that unhappy accident, it is with a good deal of remorse; and it isn't pleasant; but the moment you see him he tries to make light of it, and to put you at your ease, and then you are glad that he takes it so courageously. And just think what

it must be to one who has led so active and stirring a life—to be chained down like that. Why, it's dreadful to think of! People who are walking about, and going where they like, can't even imagine what that is. Then the want of society—the dull evenings—the wet days when he is alone and indoors—do you wonder that I should be sorry for him, and feel sometimes a little miserable about it all?'

'For my part,' said Janie, somewhat coldly, 'I don't see why you should feel miserable about it in any way whatever. An accident may happen to any one. And I can't understand a bit the interest you take in him. Why, Sabie, he is the last man in the world I should have expected you to make friends with—a man who seems to have no aim in life but to amuse himself.'

'But you know, Janie, there are many people who don't even succeed in doing that,' said Sabina, in her gentle way; these two were not in the habit of quarrelling.

The end of it was that Sabina took Mrs. Wygram down to Brighton, and got rooms for them both in a house in Regency Square.

'I shall be such a dull companion for you, Sabie,' the old lady said. 'Don't you know any young people here?'

'I don't know a soul in the place,' Sabina answered, 'except Mr. Foster, and he is another invalid. Fancy what a business I shall have in talking you both into something like light-heartedness! But how am I to see him? I want to see him; and I know where he is living—in the crescent where the Grand Hotel is. But I suppose we could hardly call on him, could we; or send him a message that we are here?'

'He is rather a stranger, isn't he?' said Mrs. Wygram doubtfully.

'A stranger? Not a bit of it! You don't keep talking to any one day after day without getting to understand him pretty well; and I seem to have known Mr. Foster all my life. I have heard all about his schooldays, and his home, and his people, and his pursuits. I assure you, there is an amount of frank egotism about him that is quite charming; and you know you should always encourage people to talk about themselves; it's the subject that interests them most.'

'You have such a wonderful patience, Sabie, with old people and with young,' said Mrs. Wygram, who had some acquaintance with the girl.

'Oh, but that is just the way I take of amusing myself,' said Sabina lightly; 'just as other people take to whist, or billiards, or horse-racing. Now tell me what is to be done. If you knew Mr. Foster you could write and ask him to call—if the bath-chair can be got into the house. But you don't know him. Well, suppose I were to send him a note like this: "Young man, I'm old enough to be your mother, so don't be offended if I ask you to come along and have a cup of tea with Mrs. Wygram and myself?"'

'You old enough to be his mother, indeed!' Mrs. Wygram cried. 'How old is he, then?'

'Oh, I don't know,' Sabina said carelessly. 'But tell me what we should do now. Or shall we go out for a little walk first and decide so weighty a matter afterwards?'

And as it turned out, the matter was decided for them, and that forthwith and in the simplest way. When they went out they naturally strolled down towards the Pier; for the band was playing, and the wide promenade seemed a cheerful kind of place; and about the very first person they saw there was Mr. Foster himself, whose chair was being slowly pulled along. His quick, clear eyes smiled a recognition at once; Sabina, in the frankest and friendliest way, went up and shook hands with him, and introduced him to Mrs. Wygram; and there they remained, chatting, asking questions, and apparently very well pleased to have met once more.

But Mrs. Wygram was not so well pleased. She had heard a good deal about Mr. Foster from Janie; and perhaps she had unconsciously imbibed a little of the jealousy with which Janie regarded the young gentleman. Anyhow, she was distinctly of opinion—as she remained a trifling space apart, and only half-listened to their conversation—that the manner of Mr. Foster towards Sabina was not right. It was a great deal too easy and familiar. Her beautiful Sabie (she considered) ought to be regarded with a respectful adoration—especially by young men; whereas this person in the bath-chair looked at Sabina, and spoke to her, just as if she might have been anybody. In truth,

Sabina appeared to be a good deal more pleased by this chance meeting than he was; she was interested, animated, smiling, and friendly; while he glanced at her in a critical kind of way, and seemed in no wise sufficiently grateful for her condescension.

'Well, did you do as I told you?' he said. 'Did you "go Nap" on Cherry Blossom for the Grand National?'

'No, I did not,' she answered. 'But I hope you won?'

'Oh, I don't call it winning; I call it getting back a little of my stolen property. And I did pretty well on the City and Suburban too,' he added cheerfully.

'But,' she said, 'perhaps I ought not to congratulate you on winning, for, of course, that means that some one must have lost.'

'Oh, you needn't be sorry when the "bookies" get caught; they make a good enough thing of it in the end—be sure of that.'

'But some one must lose,' said this patient disciple—and strange it was to Mrs. Wygram to hear Sabie talk about horse-racing.

'Why, yes. The great bulk of the public lose, and must lose; and why shouldn't they lose? They bet for fun, whether they know anything about the horses or not. Well, if you want your amusement, you've got to pay for it; and if your amusement is backing horses, you've got to pay for that too. You see, it isn't every one who can keep a yacht or a pack of hounds; but every one can back a horse, thanks to the noble swells who provide the animals. I consider it very disinterested on their part; it isn't many of them who have made money over it; I know a good number of gallant sportsmen who have a fine display of gold cups on their dining-room sideboard, but who don't quite like to be asked how much they cost.'

'But still, to encourage general gambling in that way——' Sabina was going to protest, but he interrupted her with a laugh.

'Oh yes, I know, Miss Zembra. It's very wicked and bad; and the grocer's apprentice who filches from his master's till in order to back a favourite will no doubt come

to the gallows; and it's very distressing that people will go on risking their money on games of chance; but then, such is life.'

'We might try to make life a little better than we find it,' she said tentatively; somehow he had not the air of one who would listen to words of wisdom.

He looked at her and said gravely: 'I'm going to tell you something. Don't you forget it. If you can get anybody to give you ten to one against Macedon for the Two Thousand, just you take it—and you'll remember me with tears of gratitude.'

'You are incorrigible,' she said; but she said it with a smile; for there was far more of good humour than of argument in her composition; and she was pleased to find him so confident and self-reliant and in such good spirits.

They went out to the farther end of the Pier, which he said was his favourite retreat; for there, while he could command an uninterrupted view of the coastline all the way from Worthing Point out to the successive chalk headlands of Seaford and the Seven Sisters, the music near at hand was softened to the ear by the intervention of the glass screen. He could either listen to the band; or read the morning newspaper, and its guesses about the forthcoming race-meetings; or overlook the small boats rowing below; or watch here and there a big steamer leaving an almost stationary trail of smoke along the far horizon. And this particular morning, as it happened, was exceedingly bright and cheerful; a light west wind blowing; the clear green water glancing in a myriad diamonds of sunlight along each shimmering ripple; now and again soft purple patches telling of the shadow of a cloud; overhead a quite summer-like sky. Then there was much liveliness abroad; the last delayed of the fishing-smacks coming in from the south-east; the heavy-booted crews making their way home to bed; the salesmen and packers getting off the boxes and barrels of mackerel and conger to the London market; holiday-folks down on the shingle; children paddling where the sand showed at low tide; the boatmen and photographers and newsboys busy; a traffic brisker than usual for that time of the year visible in the King's Road.

'Oh yes,' he continued, as Sabina stood by the side of the Bath-chair, or leant over the rails to watch the manœuvring of a small sailing-boat below; 'this is an excellent place; there is always something going on, something to look at. I know all the girls—I mean by headmark. It's quite nice to see the young things trying to make-believe that it is summer already with their pretty bonnets and dresses. And you, Miss Zembra,' he added, with no embarrassment at all, 'aren't you going to take advantage of the seaside? You know people allow themselves a little liberty when they come here—in the way of costume, I mean. Pray don't think me rude, but I should fancy now that a sailor's hat—a straw hat, you know, with a band of red silk, or something of that kind—would become you very well, and be a little brighter for the seaside. Don't you?'

The suggestion was no doubt made in simple friendliness; but Mrs. Wygram did not like it.

'If you would care to see the prettiest dress Miss Zembra ever wore—to my thinking—I can show it to you.'

She took from her pocket an envelope, and from the envelope a photograph. It was a photograph of Sabina in her hospital costume—a plain striped gown; a white cap and apron—the apron furnished with shoulder-straps; her nurse's implements slung by a silver chain from her girdle; a silver brooch—an anchor—at her neck. He glanced at the photograph, and handed it back with a laugh.

'I did not think they would have allowed you to wear any ornament,' he said, still addressing Sabina; 'but I see you wore the same brooch you are wearing now.'

'And you would not easily get Miss Zembra to part with that brooch,' said the little old lady proudly. 'It was given her by some of the boys on board the *Chichester;* they subscribed among themselves—and that was what they sent her. At least,' continued Mrs. Wygram (for she was determined that Mr. Foster should know there were other people who could appreciate Sabina, if he seemed so careless and indifferent),—'at least that was the story, and perhaps it is partly true. But I have my suspicions. I know that the only time I ever went down to see the

Chichester there was a young officer there who went round the ship with us, and I noticed that he was particularly attentive to a young lady—I wouldn't mention names for the world. And when he spoke of this subscription, I guessed who would help in that. Boys in training-ships don't have many pence, I should think. Oh yes, and the letter he sent!—I shouldn't have expected lads like that to use such beautiful English——'

'Now, Mrs. Wygram, don't you say anything against my boys,' Sabina said, but she had turned away partly—perhaps to get a better view of that little sailing-boat.

They chatted and looked around them until lunch-time; and then they made for home—the two ladies accompanying the Bath-chair as far as the turnstile of the pier.

'Good-bye,' he said, and raised his hat slightly.

But Sabina hesitated for a moment. 'Shall you be out again in the afternoon?' she asked.

'Well, no,' he answered. 'I was thinking of looking in at the tennis court.'

'What, on a day like this?' she exclaimed. 'Surely that is unwise on the part of an invalid.'

'Oh, but I don't look on myself as an invalid at all,' he said. 'I am an expectant—a tide-waiter—a tied-waiter, you see! An excellent joke! Well, good morning!'

'If you will come along at five o'clock, we will give you a cup of tea,' she said.

'Thanks, awfully—but a Bath-chair is such a nuisance in a room——'

'Oh, don't say that!' she interposed, with a touch of appeal in her tone.

'Well, I will come, if I may; what is your number in the Square?'—and then, when he had got that information, they went their several ways.

During lunch Sabina talked of nothing but Mr. Foster, and of his wonderful courage and equanimity under this heavy trial.

'You don't know how grateful I am to him,' she said, 'when I see him so light-hearted. If he were to fret and pine over it, as many another man would, just think how miserable I should feel.'

'So you've said a hundred times, Sabie,' Mrs. Wygram answered patiently, 'and so you've said to Janie; but if you were to talk from now to Doomsday, you wouldn't convince me that you ought to hold yourself responsible for that accident.'

'Why was I such a fool as to call out, then?' was the immediate rejoinder. 'I don't believe he would have harmed the dog at all. And I am quite certain he wouldn't have gone near the heap of gravel.'

Mrs. Wygram did not choose to argue; but somehow she was not well disposed to Mr. Foster.

'You may be as grateful as you please,' she said to Sabina; 'I should have liked to hear of his being a little grateful, on his side, for all the kindness and attention he received.'

'Ah, don't be so hard on the poor fellow, dear Mrs. Wygram,' said Sabina. 'How would you like it if you were shut up in a Bath-chair like that?'

'How should I like it?' Mrs. Wygram retorted, with a trifle of indignation in her voice. 'Well, I know this; if I were in a Bath-chair, and if I were a man, and a young lady came of her own accord to pay me a good deal of attention, and to be very friendly and courteous and obliging, I think I should do or say something to show that I recognised how kind she was trying to be. I should not show myself an indifferent boor. Why, a man——'

'Now, now, dear Mrs. Wygram, please to stop,' said Sabina; but she was not very angry. 'You don't know what you're saying. And besides, that is why I like Mr. Foster; he is honest, and does not pretend to be more interested in you than he really feels.'

After lunch Mrs. Wygram was ordered by her imperious nurse to go away and lie down for a while; and then, about half-past three, Sabina came for her.

'The people are coming out,' she said. 'Shall we go for a little stroll? I want to see the fashions.' And then she said: 'Really, the clear light here is dreadful for showing you how shabby your clothes are. Did you ever see anything so disgraceful as this bonnet of mine?'

She was holding it up to the window. Then she said: 'Yes, we will go along to the shops; and you know we ought to join in with the others and make-believe that summer is come already; and I am going to get you a new bonnet—no, no, now, you needn't protest, for I always have my own way in the end—yes, I am going to get you a bonnet of a lighter colour, with a little frivolity in it, for of course when we are at the seaside we must follow the seaside fashions.'

And then again she said, 'I wonder, now, if I am too old and grave a person to wear a sailor's hat?'

'You too old, Sabie? Oh yes, indeed! You look so old!' was Mrs. Wygram's answer.

But when they had got outside and were going along the King's Road, a sudden thought occurred to Sabina's companion.

'Sabie,' she said, 'what put the notion of getting a sailor's hat into your head? Was it Mr. Foster's suggestion?'

'And supposing it was?' the tall, bland-featured girl answered, in her good-natured way.

'But do you know what you are doing?' Mrs. Wygram said half-angrily. 'It is not the custom for young gentlemen to advise young ladies as to what they should wear.'

'Oh, nonsense!—a chance hint of that kind?—I should have taken it from anybody. And besides,' Sabina added, 'what do you mean by young ladies and young gentlemen? I tell you I am old enough to be his mother.'

'Oh yes, very old!' Mrs. Wygram replied, with a fine irony; 'and very plain, too. Remarkably plain. I suppose you didn't notice how the people were looking at you out at the end of the Pier? I did, if you didn't; and to me it didn't seem the best of manners. And you'll put a band of red silk round the hat, as he directed you?'

'No, I don't think I will do that,' Sabina answered. 'I will get a band of cream-coloured satin, I think; or of the colour of this dress, if I can.'

'And you will be wearing that hat when he comes along this afternoon?'

'Well, no; for I don't wear a hat indoors.'

'But it will be lying about?'

'It may. But, dear Mrs. Wygram, what do you mean? A trifle of this kind! And Janie isn't here; you know it is Janie who generally chooses my things for me.'

That evening Mrs. Wygram had to write to her daughter, and this was the postscript of the letter:

'I don't know what to say or think about Sabie. Of course she is goodness itself to me—that she is always—and never was she more kind and considerate and affectionate. And you know how I love the girl. But she puzzles me. For either she carries good nature to the verge of folly—and over it—or else she is the most abominable flirt that ever breathed.'

This set Janie a-crying; and she answered in hot haste:

'Mother, I beg you will not say such things about Sabie. It's very little you know about her if you can think them for a moment. But I see how it is, and understand it perfectly; you *do* love her, and you are *jealous;* and I knew that would be so the moment you saw how interested she is in Mr. Foster. I hope it won't be a misery to all of us. What should we do, mother, if anything happened to our Sabie?'

CHAPTER X

AT THE ACADEMY

THE tender heart of Janie was to be still further distracted. Sabina refused to go up to town for the Private View of the Academy.

'I can't leave my charge,' she wrote, 'just when it is most necessary that she should be driven about, and walked about, and generally looked after.'

Janie, in great distress, forthwith appealed to her mother.

'She *must* come, mother. It is a promise. I pledged my word to Walter Lindsay that she should go with us. Surely it cannot be that she is so fascinated by that contemptible horse-jockey that she is going to disappoint us all in this way? Of course, don't repeat what I have just said, or she will think it necessary to defend him, and I don't want to quarrel with her about anybody like *that*. But appeal to the real Sabie—to our Sabie. Does she know how Mr. Lindsay has set his heart on taking her to the Academy? And Mrs. Tremenheere has promised to go with us in your place; and then if Sabie comes up on the Thursday night she can go down to you again on the following afternoon or evening. The truth is, I have not dared to speak of it to Mr. Lindsay; I could not do it; I tell you he has just set his heart on it; and it's for you, now, dearest mother, to try to bring that abominable wretch to her senses.'

There was not the slightest difficulty about it. When it was pointed out to Sabina that her refusal to go would give a great deal of pain to two of her friends, she merely

elevated her eyebrows a little in surprise, as if that had never occurred to her before; and when Mrs. Wygram added that she herself would take it as a favour if Sabie yielded to the wishes of those kind people, Sabina instantly and good-naturedly said yes. Only she stipulated that she should go up on the Friday morning and return the same evening.

Walter Lindsay never knew how near he had been to a bitter disappointment; he was merely told (Janie assuming a little air of authority on the occasion) at what hour he might expect Sabina to arrive at Burlington House. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that he had not been able to obtain the use of any private room for their luncheon; though one distinguished Academician had facetiously offered to place the Diploma Gallery at the disposal of the party. And be sure he was waiting at the top of the staircase long before the time at which Mrs. Tremenheere and Sabina and Janie had promised to appear. The people came pouring in: elderly gentlemen already opening their catalogues and adjusting their glasses; gorgeous matrons scanning the crowd in search of friends; young ladies with a quick eye for other young ladies' gowns; young gentlemen with a quick eye for those young ladies' faces. And to many of these the tall and pale young artist, who stood as close as might be to the wicket, was known; and he had perfunctorily to shake hands with them and say a word or two; but ever his anxious gaze went down that wide, thick-carpeted stair, eagerly scrutinising each successive group as it arrived. And as it chanced he was caught napping after all. A sculptor friend came to him and touched him on the shoulder.

'Lindsay,' he said, 'I want you to come and look at my bust of Mrs.—— Have you seen it yet?'

'No, I haven't; but I will remember; all right.'

'Come along, now, won't you?—a minute will do—the fact is, they've all been abusing it and pitching into it—and I want you to say it isn't so bad as all that.'

'But I'm waiting for some people, man,' Lindsay broke in, not too cordially.

'My good fellow, it won't take you a minute!'

And so he cast a last despairing glance down the crowded staircase, and impatiently followed his friend into the sculpture room. He was not there more than three minutes. And then it was, as he was hastening back to his post, that he suddenly found before him—Sabina! Other people saw advancing towards him a young lady, tall and fair and smiling; he only saw a face, a kind of bewilderment of light shining there and in her eyes; and if his heart seemed to choke him somewhat (in a manner not quite consistent with the new friendship he had established) he had scarcely time to attend to that. Perhaps he shook hands with her—he did not know; probably he also greeted Mrs. Tremenheere and Janie; at all events he seemed to want to take them through all the rooms at once; and yet not to know where to begin; while the fingers that held the open catalogue were far from being so steady as the new friendship demanded. As for Sabina, she was certainly not perturbed. Nor did she seem particularly anxious to see the pictures. She looked at the crowd in her gentle, bland, pleased way; recognising here and there a familiar face, and perhaps not paying as much attention to her eager guide as she ought to have done. However, she eventually yielded to his solicitation and they began their laborious round. He made it as easy as possible for her—if Mrs. Tremenheere and Janie had pretty well to look out for themselves. He took her to all the principal pictures. If any one stopped her and spoke to her, he made no scruple about dragging her away, and insisting upon her looking at this or that. And Sabina was very kind to him, for she knew he was giving himself a great deal of trouble on her behalf; and the new relationship he had established between himself and her seemed to him a distinctly joyous thing—sending, as it were, flashes of gladness through his veins every time she turned towards him, or spoke to him, or happened to let the sleeve of her bronze plush cloak come near his arm. It was a very pretty costume, by the way, that she wore, though it was not the simple brown homespun of his expectation; and he could see that it was admired—and that Sabina was admired—by the little covert glances that

both men and women directed towards her as they passed. And of course he perjured his soul a hundred times in quickly assenting to everything she said. Why should he dispute her judgment? What was his miserable cut-and-dried knowledge of technique as compared with the generous appreciation of a fresh young soul? Could he check kindness? Would he like her eyes to be less benignant? Where her abundant good nature saw merit, what right had he to point out defects? In short, what mattered the pictures to him in any way whatever? He would have made a holocaust of the whole collection had it belonged to him, if only Sabina would have been interested in the riotous blaze. And all this, it must be remembered, was but part of the new friendship.

'And where is your own picture, Mr. Lindsay?' Sabina said to him.

'Oh, that is nothing,' he answered.

'But I wish to see it,' she said.

'Really, it is not worth looking at,' he protested. 'It is a little thing I sent in merely to get a ticket for Varnishing Day.'

'But I wish to see it,' she said, with mild persistence.

'The water-colour room is at the other end,' he pointed out; for he did not wish Sabina to take this luckless little contribution as in any way representative of his work.

'Then you won't take me to see it?'

Of course this was a command; and forthwith they set about making their way through the now crowded rooms. And scant indeed was the recognition his friends obtained from him on that busy morning; for it seemed as if there were a hundred thousand things he had to say to Sabina; and that the time was all too short. And then, was it not his duty to keep her amused and interested and pleased? He was her host, in a measure; he was responsible for her being entertained; he would have ample opportunities of talking with all those various friends and acquaintances after Sabina had gone away once more from London.

'Why, you seem to know every one,' she said to him, as they were making their slow progress through the galleries.

And yet he had no wish to show her off—to proclaim

their friendship, that is to say, before all these people. Far rather would he have had her go away into some quiet corner—into the room for architectural drawings, for example—and sit down there, so that he might recollect some of the hundred thousand things he had to tell her. He was not in any way anxious that these good folk should admire Sabina, or look at her pretty dress, or be struck by the proud and gracious set of her neck and shoulders, and the sweetness of her smile. He was far more anxious that she should not become tired, or indifferent, or bored; and the hundred thousand things he had to tell her seemed to narrow themselves down in a dreadful way, or refused to be summoned altogether; so that he could only say to himself, 'Well, I am a blatant idiot; but Sabina is so good-natured that she pretends to be pleased.' The new friendship was progressing.

Eventually they found the little picture; it was a harmless kind of thing—merely a study of a black windmill and an up-lying field, golden with charlock, against an almost silver-white sky; and when Sabina out of kindness would praise it, he rather resented her approval, for he did not wish her to imagine that was how he always painted.

'But you need not think that,' she said. 'I have seen so much of your work. And I am sure I did not half thank you for the beautiful drawing you sent me from the Shannon. I was so busy at the time. But I prize it none the less, I assure you; do you know that I took it down to Brighton and we have it hung up there—of course to be brought away again when we leave?'

'Oh, did you?' he said; there was a kind of music in the air.

And then he suddenly discovered that it was a quarter to one, and therefore time for lunch.

'Do come, now,' he said, 'and we will get a quiet place to ourselves. I don't want to have you tired out. Besides, you must be hungry; you left Brighton by the 9.45.'

'How do you know that?' she said, glancing at him.

'You must have left then; I looked at the time-table.'

And they did, as it happened, get a quiet corner for themselves in the luncheon-room; and whether it was

owing to some mysterious subsidy or not, they appeared to be very well attended to, while people at the other tables were looking vacuously about them or making impatient and fruitless appeals to overharassed waiters. Curiously enough, too, Sabina sat at his right hand, where Mrs. Tremenheere should have been; but perhaps that was an accident. And Janie was very pleased and happy; and said in an undertone to Mrs. Tremenheere—for Mr. Lindsay had a good many things to say to Miss Zembra, so that these two were occupied—that never in all her life had she seen Sabie looking so beautiful. Janie was a kind-hearted creature, and talked to Mrs. Tremenheere without ceasing.

And what did Lindsay say, now that she and he were together in this secluded nook, their shoulders almost touching, their heads not far apart, he humbly solicitous about the smallest details of the frugal little banquet he had provided for her? Well, it was all a lamentation over the fact that no ladies could be present even as lookers-on at the Academy dinner that was to take place the following evening.

'You see,' he continued—and he addressed himself exclusively to Sabina—'the walls are covered to the roof with pictures—as many a poor wretch knows to his cost; and I suppose it would be impossible to have a gallery for spectators. But it is a pity; for there is no such sight to be seen anywhere else, or at any other time, in Great Britain. All England's greatest are there—her statesmen, and poets, and soldiers, and lawyers, and painters; a stranger would think he had got among a lot of portraits out of the illustrated papers; it is an extraordinary assemblage of the brains and wealth of the country. Yes,' he said, glancing at her; 'I have no doubt you are asking yourself how I ever came to be in that galley.'

'Indeed I was not,' she said warmly.

'I asked myself the question,' he continued modestly, 'when I looked round last year and found myself the only insignificant duffer at our particular table, for I'm not even a picture-buyer. But I have a good many friends in the Academy—I suppose that is it.'

'I should rather think it was meant as a recognition of your work,' Sabina said gently; 'and I should be very proud of it if I were you.'

'However, as I was saying,' he interposed rather quickly, 'it is an extraordinary sight; and then, you know, they keep the lights somewhat lowered during dinner—though you wouldn't think it, for the place is so brilliant—until the President has proposed the toast of the Queen's health, and then, when he winds up with "Your Royal Highnesses, my lords, and gentlemen—the Queen!" all of a sudden the lights are put at full blaze, and the effect is quite startling. You should see them all standing up—the Queen's Ministers, the ex-Ministers, Judges, Generals, Bishops, Academicians, and all—while the singers at the far end of the hall sing "God save the Queen!" And to think that such an assemblage is brought together every year in England, and that there should be no ladies to look on!'

And why was he so miserable because there would be no gentle-eyed spectators of the following night's banquet? At the banquet of the previous year—the first to which he had been invited—the subject had not even occurred to him.

'No,' he continued, 'nor do they ask any womenfolk to the annual dinner of the Academy Club—at the Trafalgar at Greenwich. But that is less to be wondered at, for it is a kind of half-private affair; and there is a good deal of jollification going on—smoking, and singing, and speech-making. Oh, and very pretty it is at the beginning of the evening, if you happen to have a seat facing the big bay window, and can watch the red-sailed barges floating down on the yellow water. It's rather an early dinner, you know, though they keep it up late enough; for when they get back to town, a lot of them—those that aren't afraid of their wives—generally go down to Mackinnon's rooms in Buckingham Street, to have a midnight palaver and a final pipe or two.'

'There seems to be a fair amount of merry-making in the art world,' Sabina observed.

'At present there is,' he said rather apologetically, 'because everybody is glad to have got finished with his

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year's work. And from now on to the Academy Conversazione at the end of June, there won't be much painting done—amongst the landscapers, anyway—there will be a good deal of dining, and dancing, and lawn-tennis, and so on—but after the Conversazione the general dispersal will take place—away to Brittany, and Spain, and the Riviera, or over to Holland, or up to Norway, or to the wilds of Connemara and Galway—each man wanting to have a place all to himself, of course, and growling if any one comes near him.'

'And where are you going?' she asked.

'I?'

The question seemed to startle him. Perhaps he had made no definite plans. Or had some wild notion flashed into his brain that he would fain have that depend on Sabina's whereabouts?

'I hardly know,' he stammered. 'I suppose you too will be going away from London, Miss Zembra?'

He hardly looked up at her.

'I think not,' she said simply, 'unless Mrs. Wygram improves much more rapidly than she is doing at present. I will keep her at Brighton for some time; and I may as well make that my holiday.'

'Do you mean that you will be in London all the autumn when everybody else will be away?' he asked, and he had grown suddenly thoughtful.

'Your everybody else will be away, no doubt,' she answered smiling; 'but my everybody else can't get away, unhappily. Yes; if I take a holiday now, I daresay I shall be in London through the autumn. But isn't it time we were returning to the pictures?'

And he was not unwilling to take up his task again, for he had been forming certain dark designs. Sabina was going down to Brighton by the 4.30 express; Mrs. Tremenheere and Janie wanted to wait to see the people arrive in the afternoon; and it was Janie who considerately suggested that, if Sabina must really leave, perhaps Mr. Lindsay would be so kind as to see her as far as Victoria Station. Sabina protested that nothing of the sort was necessary; but Mr. Lindsay took little heed of the protest;

on the contrary, he rather hurried her through the remaining rooms in order that they should get away early. He was not sure that they would get a cab easily. The streets might be blocked. Wasn't St. James's Park torn up as usual? The end of it all was that he and she together left the Academy when it was barely four o'clock.

And to be in a hansom with Sabina!—to be so close to her—to see her gloved hand resting on the little iron ledge—to have charge of her small travelling-bag—to be able to direct her attention to this and that—to steal an occasional covert glance at the pale oval of her cheeks and her soft clear eyes! Of course he told the cabman to drive round by Hyde Park Corner and Grosvenor Place; and the trees in the Green Park were showing their foliage now; and there was a breezy light in the May skies; and the crowd in Piccadilly and the continual string of carriages made up a picture sufficiently animated and cheerful. The new friendship had begun so delightfully! Sabina was with him, and with him alone; he had charge of her; there was none to interfere. And she was to be all by herself in London through the autumn—when still she might want, and welcome, a friend.

And then, again, at Victoria Station a little judicious bribery procured him access to the platform; and when he had procured for her a seat in the Pullman car, and purchased for her a vast assortment of magazines and illustrated papers, they had nearly a quarter of an hour in which to walk up and down. Alas! that the time was so short—for he still seemed to have a hundred thousand things to say—and he wanted her to have some tea—and he was so sorry that the sleeve of her plush cloak had been somewhat marked by her driving in the hansom—and he even went the length of lightly smoothing out one or two of these creases. Because, you see, Janie was not there, and Sabina was accustomed to have some one wait on her and be kind to her.

The hateful hands of the great clock kept creeping on, and at length the guard came along with his warning. Sabina went in and took her seat. He kept by the window outside until the train began to move slowly away; and

then Sabina smiled her farewell thanks to him; and presently he found himself standing on that wide, empty platform, alone.

He did not go away quickly from Victoria Station; no, he kept lingering about there, looking at the long platform where he and she had walked together. And when at length he set out for home he went rather slowly and thoughtfully; and, strangely enough, he chose his way by Cornwall Gardens and Victoria Road and through Kensington Square. And then, again, he did not pursue a straight course; he turned back a little in Kensington High Street; and went into a florist's shop there; and rather idly looked about; and seemed more interested in the place than in the purchase he eventually made. The flowers he directed to be sent to Miss Janie Wygram; but he did not send his card with them; he only meant that they should go to the dusky drawing-room where sometimes he had found Sabina in the bygone days.

But at last he got home and into his studio. Somehow it seemed a very lonely and silent place; and he could not even think of work; almost mechanically he threw off his coat and hat, and sat down to the piano, and began to let his fingers wander over the keys. And what were his fancies about? Well, they were not very sad after all; for he was thinking of August—and the great city very empty, but for the presence of Sabina—and his being in London during that strange time—and sometimes seeing her. And what was the air that he was quite inadvertently—and somewhat slowly and absently—playing? He did not himself notice how entirely inappropriate it was to the new friendship:

Parlatele d'amor, o cari fior,
Ditele che l'adoro,
Ch' è il solo mio tesoro,
Ditele che il mio cor langue d'amor!

CHAPTER XI

A FOREBODING

SABINA returned to Brighton, and to Mrs. Wygram, and to long, idling, sunny mornings at the end of the West Pier in the society of Mr. Fred Foster. Mrs. Wygram looked on at this continual and ever-increasing intimacy with an alarm which it was impossible for her to put into words. In her small way, too, she did what she could to avert the danger that she too clearly foresaw. But it was in vain that she hinted her preference for inland drives; and she could not well insist, for it was Sabina who defrayed the cost of these amusements. And it was in vain that she tried to cultivate Sabina's interest in Mr. Lindsay; pointing out his name in the list of the guests at the Academy banquet; telling her how he had been included in the toast of the 'Outsiders' at the Academy Club dinner at Greenwich, and that his speech in reply had produced the most favourable impression; coming back again and again to inconsequent praise of the Shannon drawing they had hung up in their small sitting-room; and wondering if there was a possibility of his being descended from the high-sounding

Sir David Lindsay of the Mount,
Lord Lion King at Arms.

Sabina, however, seemed indifferent about Mr. Lindsay. She expressed no dissent when Mrs. Wygram insisted that he was so clever, and handsome, and popular, and modest, and all the rest of it; nay, she would even admit that that was true, and that he was deserving of all good things; but there an end. And Mrs. Wygram was afraid to express any more clearly her wishes—and her fears.

Moreover, as time went on, she observed a remarkable alteration in Mr. Foster's manner towards Sabina, and it came about in this way. On the morning after Sabina's return from London they as usual strolled out to the end of the Pier, and there, sure enough, was the occupant of the Bath-chair reading a pink-coloured sporting paper, and apparently very well content with himself.

'Ah, how do you do, Miss Zembra!' said he. 'I was thinking about you yesterday when you were in London.'

'Indeed.'

'Yes. I chanced to fall in with one of the local magnates—an ex-Mayor—who said I had met him somewhere or other, I forget where, and we had a pretty long chat together. Well, amongst other things he was telling me about a fête and bazaar they mean to hold in the Pavilion Gardens to raise funds for—what was it?—I think some Convalescent Home attached to the Children's Hospital; and that his wife had undertaken to get up a stall for the sale of flowers and bonbons, and so on. But the ex-Mayoress, it appears, is a sensible woman. She says she wants to obtain the services of an exceedingly pretty young lady, who would be able to get plenty of money for the flowers from the young fellows about. Well, I told him I knew some one who answered that description, and who might possibly be induced to help.'

Now this was Mr. Foster's ordinary manner towards Sabina; and bitterly and angrily did Mrs. Wygram resent it. Why should he talk to her so coolly and indifferently? How dared he say to her face that she was a pretty young lady? What kind of a description was that of Sabina? Why, he almost assumed an air of patronage—said Mrs. Wygram to herself in her jealous wrath—this whipper-snapper, who was not worthy of having a single look of her beautiful Sabie bestowed on him!

There was little difficulty in persuading Sabina to give her services in aid of the Children's Hospital; only she said to him: 'You know, Mr. Foster, that charity has been defined as A asking B to help C. Now I want to know what A is going to do this time.'

'Who is A?'

'You.'

'How am I A?'

'Because you asked me to do certain things for certain other people. But what are you going to do yourself?'

'Well,' said he solemnly, 'if my little speculation on the Two Thousand comes off all right you won't find me behindhand. No, no; you'll have one good customer at all events. But what am I to do with the flowers when I've got them? I don't know anybody in this town hardly.'

'What are you to do with them? Give them back to me and I will sell them over again,' said Sabina promptly.

It did not seem to occur to him that he might present the flowers to Sabina herself; perhaps he thought she was too matter-of-fact a young woman to care for such things.

However, the date fixed for the bazaar was some way off yet; and in the meantime they had got into a long spell of fine weather; and these two saw a good deal of each other, in the open air and the sunlight. Their meeting of a morning at the end of the Pier was almost an understood arrangement; and then in the golden afternoons they would pass into the greensward enclosure of Regency Square, or go round to the Pavilion Gardens, now becoming beautiful with flowers and the clear-tinted young summer foliage. And not only had Sabina got her sailor's hat, but she appeared to be much more particular about her costume than had been her wont in London; she made herself very neat and trim; and wore pretty things round her neck and at her wrists; and was most fastidious about the dressing of her hair. Mrs. Wygram ventured to make some little comment; and the girl only looked surprised; and said she supposed that it was idleness that made her attentive to such trifles.

And very bright and cheerful and animated looked those Pavilion Gardens on the day set apart for the fête; the umbrageous elms shimmering in their freshest green; young maidens and children in summer costume strolling along the paths, or crossing the wide smooth lawn; two regimental bands playing alternately; long strings of coloured lamps already hung up for the evening illumination; the white tents round the enclosure busy with visitors

Sabina's stall was almost entirely given up to flowers; and not only had she an abundant store of sprays and button-holes and bouquets, but also she had large masses of wall-flower, daffodils, marsh-marigolds, and the like, on the chance of the aldermen's wives and daughters understanding the art of decorating their dining-rooms. The worthy ex-Mayor and his wife, on whose behalf Sabina had undertaken the function of saleswoman, were most assiduous in bringing her customers; and she was not overexacting with her prices; sometimes people came back. Mrs. Wygram lent a helping hand. Mr. Foster was there, but made no undue profession of his acquaintance; whenever the tall, fair flower-girl was busy, he had his Bath-chair removed away under the elm-trees, and remained there, listening to the band.

And now occurred the incident which seemed to Mrs. Wygram (but perhaps she was unjustly jealous, owing to Janie's repeated warnings) to be the turning-point in Mr. Foster's attitude towards Sabina. There came into the enclosure two young fellows who appeared to be known to him; they went up and spoke to him and remained chatting. These were the first of Mr. Foster's friends that Sabina had seen; and she was rather pleased to find that they were not of a horsey type. No; they were merely a couple of tall, light-haired, healthy-complexioned, well-dressed English lads, whom one might associate with plenty of boating and cricket, but hardly with the turf. And presently she had a better opportunity of seeing what they were like, for Mr. Foster brought them along to the stall.

'Miss Zembra,' said he, 'I have brought you a couple of customers; but don't be too hard on them.'

Good-looking lads they were, she thought; though the younger one was evidently very shy. He scarcely lifted his eyes to the beautiful, gracious flower-girl; he selected the first little spray that came handy, and paid for it, and seemed rather glad to retire. The elder and taller of the two was not so timid; he appeared to be a little fastidious in his choice; and once or twice when he asked her a question, he ventured to glance at her.

'How much did you say this rose was?' he asked.

'Two shillings.'

'Oh yes, I will take that, if you please.'

He put his fingers in his waistcoat pocket and took out a couple of coins.

'I am afraid,' said he rather bashfully, 'that you will find them rather discoloured; but I hope you won't mind.'

And with that he put down two sovereigns on the board, and said 'Good morning!' and raised his hat, and went away.

'I beg your pardon—stay a moment!' Sabina instantly called to him.

He turned and came back, looking somewhat confused. Sabina was not. She smiled towards him, and said, 'You know I cannot give you any of the money back—they never allow that at bazaars—but I will give you another rose if you like.'

She picked out a white rose and handed it to him; her eyes were very gracious.

'I'm sure it's awfully kind of you,' said he, blushing furiously; and then he managed to stammer, 'and—and, of course, it's this one I shall keep—I—I don't want the other one now.'

'Here is a pin if you wish to wear it,' said Sabina. 'Mrs. Wygram, will you fasten it?'

(For Mrs. Wygram was outside the stall.)

'Thank you, very, very much,' said he; but it was to Sabina he said it, not to Mrs. Wygram.

'Look here, Lionel,' said Mr. Foster, somewhat sharply, 'we'd better clear out; we're only blocking the way.'

And so the three friends went off, and were seen of Sabina no more that day. But by and by, when she got a favourable chance, Mrs. Wygram went round and inside the stall. She seemed vexed, and yet partly inclined to laugh as well.

'Sabie,' said she, 'I don't know whether you know it or not, but I do believe you are the most atrocious flirt I ever saw in my life.'

'What do you mean?' the girl said, not a little startled.

'Why, the way you went on with that poor young fellow

—giving him a rose—and looking all kinds of things—you've sent him away with his head quite bewildered.'

'Oh, don't say that!' Sabina said, but still rather wondering. 'Why, don't you understand he gave me two sovereigns for a rose? Do you imagine boys of his age have so many sovereigns to spare—or would spend them that way if they had?'

'He would have given you his boots and his gloves and his watch-chain after the way you looked at him!' Mrs. Wygram protested.

'Oh, don't say that! I thought it was very kind of him to give me so much towards my stall; and of course I wanted to be civil to him. I hope I was,' she added boldly.

'Oh yes, you were,' Mrs. Wygram retorted. 'You were very civil indeed—if that is what you call civility. I think that is what Janie calls it too. No, she calls it kindness—she said it was only kindness when you sipped some wine out of Mr. Lindsay's chalice, so that he might put it back among his treasures.'

For an instant or two she could not remember; then a slight colour came to her face. 'I did not think there was any harm,' she said.

'I suppose you don't know that you have sent Mr. Foster away very angry?'

'Mr. Foster!' said Sabina, with her eyes wide—as if she wanted to know what Mr. Foster had to do with her.

'But it's true; and if I am not mistaken, you won't find him back here again to-day!'

Mrs. Wygram was not mistaken. Mr. Foster put in no further appearance. And it was not until the evening, when they were in the quietude of their own rooms, that Mrs. Wygram said, 'Well, now, Sabie, I will tell you the truth. I really don't think you know how pretty your eyes are; and you do mischief without intending it. You need not look at men in so frank a way; you should be a little more self-conscious and watchful. Why, you fairly blinded that young fellow this morning!'

'A schoolboy!' said Sabina, but with her cheeks reddening a little. 'I wonder you could think of such a thing!'

'Sabie, why will you go on persuading yourself that you are an old woman?' the other exclaimed. 'It's all those hospitals! You've been so accustomed to take charge of people—to be good to them, and humour them, and be a kind of mother to them—that you forget you are a young woman, with remarkably beautiful eyes. And some day or another you will break a man's heart—that will be the end.'

'Oh, you need not talk such nonsense,' said Sabina, proudly.

Now if Mr. Foster went away from the Pavilion Gardens in anger, he showed no trace of anything of the kind when they met as usual on the Pier next morning. And it was from that morning that Mrs. Wygram (in her subsequent conversations with Janie) professed to date the change in his manner towards Sabina. He no longer treated her with friendly indifference, varied now and again with a little jocose raillery; he seemed more anxious to please her and to win her favour. Those two Lionel lads happened to come down the pier that morning; and of course they stopped to speak to him; and they raised their hats to Sabina, who was standing by, and who graciously acknowledged that salutation. In the ordinary course of affairs Mr. Foster might fairly have introduced them by name to Miss Zembra, after their kindness of the day before; but he did nothing of the sort; and they had perforce to go on, rather lingeringly, as Mrs. Wygram imagined. That afternoon Mr. Foster sent Sabina some flowers. The next morning he told her he had taken a box at the theatre for that same evening; and that it would be very, very kind of her if she and Mrs. Wygram would come and keep him company.

'But a Bath-chair—in a theatre?' she said.

'Oh, George and I will manage,' he said confidently. 'If you come along in the evening, you will find me already in the box—box G it is; I should be very grateful to you if you would.'

And it seemed to her that it would be unfriendly to refuse; here he was in a strange town, with hardly any society; and he was bearing his banishment so bravely. And so she and Mrs. Wygram went, and found him comfortably ensconced in a large box commanding an easy view

of the stage; and there was a little bouquet lying in readiness for each of the ladies. The piece was a merry one, played by an excellent London company; and Sabina had not been in a theatre for many a day, and she had the natural and healthy laughter of a schoolgirl. He had tea and coffee brought to them between the acts; in short, he paid them every attention that was possible; and when they finally got home, even Mrs. Wygram had to confess, not only that they had spent a most charming evening, but that Mr. Foster, when he chose, could make himself very pleasant and agreeable.

Whether Mrs. Wygram entirely relished the change from Mr. Foster's half-supercilious indifference to his mood of eager and respectful amiability may perhaps be questioned; but at all events it afforded her plenty of material for study and conjecture. One of its chief features was an almost continual wish on his part to be justifying himself and his ways of life in Sabina's eyes. Hitherto he seemed to care nothing for her opinion; he had even jocularly told her of one or two foolish love-affairs. But now he seemed anxious to stand well with her; and would make excuses for himself and his pursuits; and would even recall things she had said on former occasions that he might urge some plea of defence.

'No, I am not a great reader,' he said one morning, *à propos* of nothing at all; 'it's men and women who interest me most——'

'Next to horses?' Sabina suggested, with a smile.

'Now, that isn't fair, Miss Zembra; but you're always hard on me of late. I don't know why. And I was going to tell you about my reading; if I were compelled to have only two books, I would choose Chaucer and Shakespere; and that is again just because they show me men and women. I don't like conundrums in literature, or wire-drawing, or fog; life isn't long enough to be spent in finding things out—just because the fellow won't speak plain. And then, after all, real men and women are just as interesting to me as those I find in books. When I am going about the streets here I find continual amusement and surprise and occupation.'

'I am very glad of that,' Sabina said in an undertone, so as not to interrupt him.

'Out at the end of the Chain Pier is a splendid place,' he continued. 'Sometimes I go there when I have missed you here; and you see a good deal of human nature about. Sometimes very pretty too. Why, is there anything prettier than to see a young girl— I mean one of those spindle-shanked creatures of twelve or thirteen, with a straw hat and long hair and big clear eyes—is there anything prettier than to see her pet an old lady—an old lady as ugly as the mischief, most likely, with fluffy black clothes, and glass bugles in her bonnet? Yes, and tease her too; and then put her arm round her and coax her into good-humour again? Or you'll see a purple-faced old sportsman—a real Punjaub jungle-cock—devilled-kidneys-for-breakfast sort of fellow—kind of chap would send blue thunder through his club if his chop were underdone, or overdone, or late by thirty seconds—you'll see him come walking out with a sickly-white girl in a long couch, and he'll hold the sunshade over her, or read the newspapers to her, and be just like a nurse to her. Then the lads and boys—and sometimes old men—at the fishing. Well, I like to see them at it; they've the true instinct; and they're very earnest about it; though I never see them get anything but a wretched little flounder or an eel. Spooners are not very interesting——'

'I beg your pardon?' said she innocently.

'Lovers, I should say. Well, they're not very interesting; they look so foolish when you chance on them. Besides, it isn't fair; they should be let alone. But I'll tell you what is very funny: to go round the churches on Sunday morning after service has begun, and you generally find outside one or two officials—sometimes a man, sometimes a woman—and they have the most curiously indifferent air on their faces. They look at the sky, they look down the street, they seem to say, "Well, we've done our part of the business; we've shut him up with his audience; he has got to get through the rest of the performance now."'

'But a church is not a theatre,' Sabina said gently.

'Not all of them,' he said; and then fearing to have

got on dangerous ground, he pointed out to her that these Sunday morning perambulations were almost a necessity in his case, as he did not like going inside in his Bath-chair.

And so this continual association and intimacy went on; and Sabina was very kind to him (as she was to every one, Janie would have said); and there was distinctly no indifference on his part. One afternoon he was in having tea with them.

'I have a little surprise for you,' he said to Sabina.

'Indeed!'

'My father and mother are coming to London next week, and purpose running down here for a day or two. I hope you will let me introduce them to you; they would be so very much pleased.'

Of course she said it was she who would be pleased; but Mrs. Wygram was struck with a sudden dismay.

'Do you know what he is doing now?' she instantly wrote off to Janie. 'He is bringing his father and mother from Buckinghamshire that Sabie may be introduced to them as his future wife. I am sure of it; I am sure that is what he means. Well, I have held my tongue all this while, but I cannot do so any longer; I must tell the girl what she is bringing on herself. Yes, this very night I will. But I wish you were here, Janie. I am not very strong just now; and I am all of a tremble when I think of it. Still, what would not one do for Sabie? And I know she is too kind-hearted to take it amiss.'

CHAPTER XII

FLIGHT

BUT it was a long time before the little woman could screw up her courage; and even at the last moment she fairly jibbed and bolted. Late that night Sabina was in her own room, and leisurely getting ready for bed; she wore a dressing-gown of pale blue and white; and the heavy masses of her golden-brown hair fell loose-flowing and free over her shoulders and down to and below her waist.

'Dear Sabie,' said Mrs. Wygram (though this was not in the least what she wanted to say), 'I would give a hundred pounds if I had it that Walter Lindsay could see you as you are now.'

'Mrs. Wygram!' Sabina exclaimed—but there was not much of ferocity in her virgin pride.

'It would be something for an artist to dream of all his life long,' Mrs. Wygram continued recklessly. 'Do you know, Sabie, you are the only woman I have ever seen who reminds me of Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel." You remember?—

> *'Her hair that lay along her back*
> *Was yellow like ripe corn.'*

'I thought my hair was brown,' Sabina said, quietly. 'However, it is not of much consequence. I have no wish to become an artist's model. Besides, you forget that Mr. Lindsay is a landscape painter.'

'But surely you know how wonderful he is in catching likenesses!' the other said. 'Why, the portraits he did of Mrs. Seeley's boys were quite marvellous. Oh yes; there's

no reason in the world why he should not do a figure-subject. And I know he was thinking of it. Yes, I know; for I have the scrap of paper he gave Janie, with the quotation for the picture. I believe I have it now.'

She pulled out her purse, and eventually found the little bit of writing. Sabina read the lines aloud—

'See where she sits upon the grassy green
(O seemly sight!)
Yclad in scarlet, like a maiden queen,
And ermines white;
Upon her head a crimson coronet,
With damask roses and daffodillies set.'

'Yes, it sounds picturesque,' Sabina said, in her placid way. 'And whom is he going to paint like that?'

'You.'

'Dear Mrs. Wygram, are you out of your mind?'

'But it's true. He wanted to know whether you would sit to him. Oh, he was so anxious about it, but quite afraid to ask you. Yes; and he said if only Janie could induce you to sit to him, he would do a pencil-drawing of you, and give it to Janie and me, as a kind of bribe, I suppose.'

'I wonder, now,' said Sabina laughing, 'how many portraits of me you would like to have in Kensington Square.'

'Don't you think we shall be glad to have them, Sabie, when you are no longer there yourself?'

And behold! here was her chance, come quite unexpectedly, and she was bound to face it. Hardly aware of what she was doing, she put her trembling fingers on the girl's arm; and piteous indeed was her tone.

'Dearest Sabie, don't be angry! No, you won't be angry—but I must speak to you—I can't stand by and not say a word—you know I love you, and I am sure we shall always be friends——'

'Now, what is all this about?' Sabina said gently, for she could see how agitated the little woman was.

'Don't you know, then, why Mr. Foster has sent for his father and mother to come to Brighton? Can't you guess? Sabie, it is to introduce you to them as their future daughter-in-law.'

For the briefest moment the girl seemed to draw herself up to her full height, and there was a proud look about her lips; but that instantly disappeared. She put her hand on the trembling hand of her companion, and patted it affectionately.

'My dear friend,' she said, with a smile; 'I see I must put you back on your quinine, and insist on the port wine at lunch. Your nerves are all wrong—why, you are fluttering at this moment like a caught rabbit—and you let all kinds of ridiculous fancies get into your brain.'

'They are not ridiculous fancies, Sabie! Why will you be so blind? But it all comes from the same thing; you will go on imagining yourself to be an elderly woman—whose business is to pet people and take care of them—whereas the truth is that you are a very dangerously attractive young woman; and I tell you that men don't understand a young woman looking at them in that frank way. In the case of a young married woman it might be different——'

'There again!' said Sabina, with an air of resignation, 'you have told me all that before, dear Mrs. Wygram; and I don't forget that you accused me of flirtation merely because I gave that pretty, yellow-haired boy a rose—in exchange for two sovereigns.'

'Yes; and if that young man is heart-whole at this moment I am very much mistaken,' Mrs. Wygram retorted. 'Why, don't you see how he is always hanging about, just for the chance of saying a word to Mr. Foster, and so being allowed to raise his hat to you?'

'Poor, innocent young thing!'

'Sabie, if you choose to act like a flirt, don't talk like one!' said Mrs. Wygram sharply.

Sabina looked at her.

'No, she said; 'you can't make me quarrel with you—I won't do it; for I know you are out of sorts; and I know you mean to be kind; so I can only say that you are quite mistaken. Why, the idea! Mr. Foster and I have been excellent friends simply because I know that no nonsense of that kind would ever enter his head.'

'But hasn't it? I am very much mistaken if it has not,'

Mrs. Wygram persisted. 'Sabie, you don't know what an amount of encouragement you have given him. And encouragement from you! I tell you, you don't know your own value. Why should you defer to his opinions—you, who have a hundred times as much brains as he has? And why should a beautiful young woman like you wear things that you think will please him?—oh, but you do, whether you are conscious of it or not. And why should you be interested in stories of racecourses and regattas and cricket; and be entertained with accounts of what happened to him when he was a schoolboy—as if his life, and every moment of it, had been of the utmost value.'

'Poor Mr. Foster!' Sabina interposed. 'There's no one to say a good word for him. If it's in London, it's Janie who keeps saying bitter things about him; and if it's in Brighton, it's you. What has he done to deserve it all—except to be unfortunate? And they used always to say that women had some sympathy for people who were unfortunate; but that was in the old days, I suppose.'

'You can't deceive me, Sabie, though you may be able to deceive yourself.'

'Can't I? Well, at all events, I can put you to bed; and that's what I am going to do now; for I won't have any of my patients sitting up and talking past midnight.'

However, this warning and appeal were not without a certain effect; for naturally a young woman feels somewhat alarmed when she is told that her manner of regarding men is a trifle too audacious. Sabina brazened it out before Mrs. Wygram; but inwardly she was resolved to be a good deal more circumspect. And she wanted to know what it was in Mr. Foster's relations with her that had prompted these wild surmises.

Accordingly, next day, she kept her eyes observant. But what could she see except that he was rather more respectful towards her than he used to be? He did not laugh at her now, nor tease her, nor hint that she was being imposed upon by the poor people she befriended. No; he was rather sympathetic in that direction; only he said he did not like the idea of her going about alone—or with such an insufficient protector as Janie. Indeed, he

chose to insist upon this point; though, of course, it was not for a cripple in a Bath-chair to offer to become her guard and champion and ally.

She observed, also, that the stories he told her—and he had always an abundant stock of them, chiefly in connection with the history of the turf—were for the most part not humorous or sarcastic as formerly, but rather tragic and romantic; and that he seemed to have a warm admiration for Miss Dorothy Vernon and her gay enterprise. On the other hand, how could she suspect him of talking with a purpose when such an incident as the following occurred? They were on the Chain Pier together. He was relating to her the sad history of the fourth Marquis of Hastings, and the reckless struggles of that luckless lad to retrieve his fortunes. Suddenly there was a considerable commotion among the few idlers on the pier; one of the anglers had hooked a large bass; you could see the fish in the clear green water below—tugging and plunging and shooting this way and that; and there was a frantic calling for the landing-net. From that instant the Marquis of Hastings, and Miss Dorothy Vernon, and Miss Sabina Zembra were alike forgotten. He took no more notice of his companion. And when, at last, amid the general rejoicing, the big fish had been hoisted up in the landing-net, and carried off to the weighing machine, and found to scale just over eight pounds, and when the prevailing excitement had quieted down, Sabina had gently to remind him that he had broken off in the midst of a story, and then he could not in the least recollect at what point. Sabina said to herself that it was impossible she could wholly engross his attention when she was so easily dispossessed by an eight-pound fish.

'Sabie,' said Mrs. Wygram that evening, 'do you know that you behaved yourself a little better to-day?'

'I am glad you approve,' Sabina answered. 'But it is none the pleasanter to have to be continually on the watch with one's friends.'

'Friendship between a young man and a pretty girl,' observed Mrs. Wygram sententiously, 'is all very well in its way, but it wants to have its limits pretty clearly defined. And I think he understands now. He noticed the change

in your manner—I could see that he did. And perhaps he is beginning to think that he was a little premature in sending for his father and mother.'

'What nonsense you talk!' said Sabina bluntly, 'I tell you the coming of his father and mother to Brighton has no more to do with me than with the man in the moon.'

'We will see.'

'If I thought such folly were possible, I would go up to London this very evening and send Janie down in my stead. I'm afraid I shall have to do that very soon in any case.'

'But, Sabie, I shall have to go back home too.'

'You? Not you! You won't be allowed to come home until you are ever so much stronger. Janie will take my place here.'

'And what will Mr. Foster do when you are gone, Sabie?'

Sabina was too proud to reply.

But this placid and equable and eventless life was far too pleasant to last. Mr. Fred Foster's father and mother arrived in due course, and were installed in the rooms he had provided for them; and the same afternoon he brought them along to call on Mrs. Wygram and Sabina. He seemed a little anxious and nervous. But if he was at all concerned about the impression likely to be produced on the old lady by the young girl, or *vice versâ*, he must have been speedily reassured. At the very first glance—while as yet this tall, thin, elegant-looking woman, with the short white curls, and apple-tinted cheeks, and soft gray eyes, had hardly entered the room—Sabina had formed a liking for her; and that was only confirmed by the singular air of refinement and graciousness of manner that seemed to surround her as she came forward. And on her side? She took the girl's hand in hers and held it; apparently she was unable to utter a word; but as she read all that that clear, beautiful, youthful face had to say to her, her eyes quickly filled with tears. Sabina was frightened—she scarcely knew why; she managed to say a few commonplace words of welcome; and then she turned to give a similar greeting to the old gentleman. As for him, it was pretty evident that he considered the whole proceeding a bore. As soon as he decently could he withdrew from the

lot of them, and went to the window and stared out there, with his hands behind him, over the tails of his highly respectable black frock-coat.

But the old lady was sitting next Sabina, and had drawn her chair very close; and she seemed unable to keep her eyes—which were kind and affectionate eyes—away from the girl. And she said that she knew her quite well already, so much had Fred written home about her; and how was she to thank Miss Zembra for all her goodness to him when he was shut up a prisoner in Lancaster Gate?—and how fortunate it was for him to have had so much of her companionship during his stay at the seaside. There was a great deal to talk about; but all through it the old lady's glances were gently scrutinising the various points of the girl's appearance, and her costume too—the beautiful line of the neck and shoulders, her hair, the trimness of her cuffs, the neatness of her brooch and collar, the slender, tapering, but large hand, the gracious arch of the eyebrow —and the more that old Mrs. Foster looked, the more and more did pleasure sit beaming upon her own face. Once or twice she touched Sabina's arm, and her fingers seemed to linger there. She followed her every word eagerly; she laughed when there was the least occasion; delight and tenderness shone in the soft gray eyes.

The old gentleman came back from the window, and rather brusquely remarked that it was a pity to waste so fine an afternoon within doors, as he had never seen Brighton, and there seemed to be plenty to see. His wife rose reluctantly; and now she held Sabina by both hands, and seemed loth to leave her.

'Good-bye, dear,' she said; and still she held her hands a little; and then with an impulse of affection, she kissed the girl—kissed her on both cheeks—and said good-bye again, and went away.

When they had gone, Sabina walked once or twice up and down the room, in a curiously agitated manner, and then came back.

'Mrs. Wygram, tell me—tell me what I have said or done—oh, you may say any harm of me you like!—but have I done or said anything wrong?—what do they mean?'

Mrs. Wygram was not one to seek a cheap triumph.

'I think it is quite clear they came to Brighton to make your acquaintance, Sabie,' she said gently.

'Yes, but why? Why did she kiss me like that?—a stranger! Why did she talk about their home in Buckinghamshire, as if she expected me to be there at any time?' And then Sabina's cheeks reddened angrily. 'What has Mr. Foster been saying about me to them? What right has he to speak about me? If I have done anything—if I have done anything I should not have done—I—I will apologise—but they have no right—they have no right—to speak about me.'

And here she burst out crying, which was a very unusual thing for her to do; and of course the next moment Mrs. Wygram's arms were round the girl's neck, and she was being soothed and pacified with all kinds of endearing phrases.

'Sabie, darling, be sure he said nothing about you but what was perfectly kind—perhaps too kind. And if there has been any mistake it can easily be put right. Perhaps the mistake is ours—I hope it is. You see, you do make people affectionate towards you. Perhaps she did not mean anything.'

'Anyway,' Sabina said quickly, 'I am going up to London to-night.'

'You cannot do that!' her friend said instantly. 'Why, it would be a confession! It would look as if you were ashamed, and had run away!' And then the little woman's courage rose. 'And what has my beautiful Sabie to be ashamed of? I say—nothing! Haven't I been with you all the time? Let them come to me if they like—but you are not going to run away for anybody.'

All doubts, however, as to the meaning of the old people's visit to Brighton were set at rest next morning. Mrs. Foster called about eleven, and asked to be allowed to see Sabina alone. Mrs. Wygram went upstairs.

And very gently, and skilfully, and affectionately did this ambassador disclose her mission. Her 'poor boy,' as she called him, had something of great importance to say to Sabina; but in his present crippled state he had never a

chance of seeing her by herself; and would she take it amiss if he had asked his mother to come and plead for him?

'And for myself, dear,' said this soft-voiced diplomatist. 'If you knew how proud I should be to call you my daughter!'

Sabina had grown very white.

'Dear child, are you ill?' the other exclaimed, 'shall I get you some water?'

'No, no, no,' the girl said; and she was striving to be quite calm. 'I am very, very sorry, but there has been some mistake. I feared it. After you came yesterday I asked Mrs. Wygram if I had done anything——'

'It's not what you have done, it's what you are,' the old lady said, and she took the girl's hand. 'You are pretty and you are good; can you wonder at the rest?'

Sabina withdrew her hand.

'I see you are afraid of me,' Mrs. Foster said smiling. 'Perhaps it was foolish of the boy to send me here to do his wooing for him. You think I should make a harsh mother-in-law to you.'

'I am sure you will be very kind to whoever your son marries,' Sabina managed to say, and with truth she said it.

'Then may I tell him that when he can come and speak for himself there will be some hope for him? I think he would be satisfied even with that.'

'Oh no, no, no; say anything but that!' Sabina said, but she seemed scarcely to understand the meaning of her words. 'No, no, that is impossible. It was not that I was thinking of. Tell him I am so very sorry for this dreadful mistake. I hope I was not—too—thoughtless; but, yes, I suppose that was it; and now what can I do? I am very, very sorry—tell him I hope he will forgive me——'

'I see I distress you,' the old lady said, and she rose from her chair. 'But remember you have only refused me; you have not refused him. Perhaps it was my rude way of asking; and he may be more successful; and no one, no one would be happier than I, should that time ever come, my dear.'

She kissed her again before she left.

'Remember that, my dear; I shall be a proud woman if ever I have to call you my daughter.'

Sabina went hurriedly to Mrs. Wygram. She was very pale; but apparently quite businesslike and collected.

'What you said has come true. I am going up to London, and I will send Janie down to-night. I could not bear to meet them again.'

'But, Sabie,' Mrs. Wygram protested, for she could guess what underlay this forced quietude of manner, 'you are going away with a quite exaggerated notion of what has happened!'

'I am not. Well, perhaps I don't understand yet all that has happened. But I wish I had taken your warning earlier. I did not know.'

Sabina arrived in Kensington Square between three and four, and bade Janie pack up and get away to Brighton as quickly as possible. But something in her look, and perhaps also in her coming to town so unexpectedly, awoke Janie's suspicions.

'What is the matter? Sabie—Sabie, you have not promised to marry Mr. Foster?'

There was a cry of appeal in her voice.

'I have refused him,' was Sabina's answer. 'And I have covered myself with shame. But I hardly understand all that has happened, and—and—don't ask me any more, Janie!'

Janie's preparations for her departure were necessarily hurried, but still she could think of her friend. Now Walter Lindsay, not content with sending Sabina a sketch from the Shannon, had also painted a small replica of the landscape she had admired in his studio, and in her absence had forwarded it to Kensington Square. It was now lying in the parlour. Amid all her hurry Janie found time to go and get hold of that little picture, and carry it swiftly and stealthily up to Sabina's room, where she placed it in a prominent position on the mantel-shelf. It would be the first thing Sabina must see when she opened the door.

CHAPTER XIII

REPENTANCE

It is hardly to be imagined that a beautiful and healthy young woman should have attained to the age of five and twenty without experiencing, at some time or other, and especially in her earlier years, certain tender preferences for members of the opposite sex; but these love-fancies, if they may be so called, had in Sabina's case been quickly absorbed in the cares and active interests of a particularly busy existence. Her character was robust and independent; she had little time for sentimental musings. Marriage had never entered into her scheme of life. Then she had seen one after another of her companions retire into the realm of matronhood, leaving her pretty much alone; and she had to deal with an ever-increasing amount of business about training-ships, convalescent homes, philanthropic societies, and the like; and it is quite probable, as Mrs. Wygram maintained, that these occupations of hers, and the almost maternal authority she had frequently to exercise in the households of the poor and sickly and indigent, had taught her a certain brusqueness and directness of manner, as of one who was too much engaged with the practical needs of the world around her to pay much attention to the refinements of etiquette. But when Mrs. Wygram plainly accused her of being a downright flirt, Sabina was entirely startled out of her self-complacency; and when, closely following upon that, Mr. Foster made her an indirect offer of marriage, thereby incurring the pain and mortification of a refusal, there was no end to her self-reproach. It was true, then, that she had acted

with an indiscretion visible to all onlookers? It was true, that she had encouraged him to believe she was willing to be his wife? What would he think of her? What would his mother think of her? She recalled the patient and gentle grace and dignity of the old lady; the evident and affectionate hope that was in all her words and looks; her promises of kindness; and she could imagine the mother going back to the son and breaking the truth to him in her delicately considerate fashion. Well, there was one woman who had never deceived him. 'The only son of his mother,' he would at least retain his faith in her—the faith that he was so openly proud of. And he would forget that he had ever been trifled with by a flirt.

Now Sabina never did a more foolish thing in her life than when she came away from Brighton. Had she remained there, her remorse and self-abasement would have been largely mitigated. She would have discovered that Mr. Foster's grief over his disappointment was not of a crushing nature. He was annoyed, it is true; but he was annoyed chiefly by the grumblings of his father, who considered that he had been dragged away hither on a fool's errand. Mr. Fred Foster was of a cheerful temperament; despondency was not much in his way.

'We haven't pulled it off this time, mother,' said he; 'but wait till you see me on my legs again. You could hardly expect a high-stepper like that to get matched with a broken-down old cripple in a paddock.'

'If I live to see you married to a girl like Miss Zembra, Freddie,' said the gentle mother, 'I shall be happy. A girl like that would have a good influence over you; you would give up your wild life. And I am sure your father and I would be glad to let you have the old house; we could do very well at Crookfield.'

'You need not count on me. I should be no such fool,' the elder Mr. Foster remarked, with some point.

Mr. Fred Foster chose to ignore this chance observation.

'Oh, don't you make any mistake, mother; Miss Zembra isn't a prig at all. She is just as fond of fun as anybody; only she has never had a chance. Why, she herself told me how well she liked looking on at some

dancing there was at an artist-fellow's house—I forget the name—and she said it was quite fine to see a lot of young people — that's the way she talks, you know — romping about and dancing the Highland schottische and enjoying themselves without restraint. Oh, there's nothing of the stuck-up school miss about her, I can assure you.'

'I do not think I should like to see Miss Zembra dancing the Highland schottische,' the old lady said quietly, 'though I hardly know why.'

'No, no,' said he with a laugh, 'nothing less dignified than the minuet in Ariadne. Well, I don't know that I should care to see her romping about either. But I'll tell you what I should like to see—I should like to see her drive a dogcart up to Ascot Heath, two ponies tandem; wouldn't that be something like the thing? And on the lawn, mother—just think of her on the lawn—why, there isn't one of them would be in it with her! Think of her figure—I tell you there's not one of the women would be in it with her—except, perhaps, Lady ——, and she doesn't go to race-meetings any more, since that thing happened. Well, do you know, mother, I don't think you would grumble at a little extravagance—a good figure wants good style—and the fashions have to be paid for——'

'My dear,' said the old lady, with the least touch of remonstrance in her placid voice, 'you speak very confidently.'

'Oh,' said he lightly, 'that is a fancy picture, you know. But I am not so sure it won't come off. Of course, I have received my snub, and must grin and bear it; but while there's life there's hope.'

Sabina had but little idea that he was accepting the situation in this cheerful frame of mind; and she was alone in London; and she was very miserable. For she had a vague conviction that some kind of calamity had occurred, for which she was mainly responsible; and her wrong-doing was none the less distressing that it was so hard to define. She kept thinking and thinking over it; wondering what Mrs. Wygram was saying to Janie about it; hoping that Mr. Foster was not too deeply offended with her. Had she sent him sufficient assurance of her sorrow over this hapless mistake? Would it not have been kinder

if she had seen him—to say a word of good-bye? And the beautiful and gentle old lady who had asked her in so pleasing a way to become her daughter: ought she not to sit down and write to her and make some excuses for her running away?

Sabina was very busy on these first days of her return to London; but she went about her duties with a preoccupied air. It struck even herself that she had less self-confidence somehow in addressing people—even those best known to her and most dependent on her. But she guessed that might be the effect of her long holiday; she had come back strange to her work; she had not fallen into the way of it yet.

Either Mrs. Wygram or her daughter wrote to their beloved Sabie every day. This was professedly a medical report; but of course it contained all the news of their uneventful life at the seaside. And it seemed unaccountable to Sabina that neither of them should ever make the least mention of Mr. Foster. Why she wished to hear about him she did not ask herself; but each letter that came from Brighton she opened quickly; and each time there was an undefined feeling of disappointment that never a word was said about him. About the mother and father she had heard; the old people had left a couple of days or so after her departure—Mrs. Foster calling at Regency Square and leaving some very affectionate messages for Miss Zembra. But never the least allusion to the young man; and Sabina, though writing every other day, somehow did not choose to ask.

The reason why Janie had nothing to say about Mr. Foster was simply this: she had learned from her mother what were his principal haunts, and she took care that her mother and herself should keep away from these. They never went out to the end of the West Pier nor to the end of the Chain Pier; and they seldom went into the Old Steyne Enclosures or the Pavilion Gardens. For Janie's vague dislike for the young man had developed into something like hatred when she heard that he had attempted to carry off Sabina from them; and that attempt having been fortunately frustrated, she was resolved that it would not be through her mother and herself that any communications

should be resumed. And she was delighted to see that Sabina never even mentioned his name. She had feared the worst from the curious interest that Sabina seemed to take in the character and fortunes of the stranger whom chance had thrown in her way. But that was all over now. He had been sent about his business. Sabina was back in London; and sooner or later Walter Lindsay would be calling in at Kensington Square to see Mr. Wygram.

Brighton is a small place; Janie was caught at last. Her mother had lain down for a while after lunch; the daughter had come out for a bit of a stroll, and had wandered down to the sea-front, where she took a seat on one of the benches. A passing Bath-chair was stopped for a moment just as it reached her.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Wygram, but I'm afraid you've forgotten me?'

She thought it was an intolerable piece of effrontery that he should speak to her after what had happened, but she could not be positively rude.

'How do you do, Mr. Foster?' she said, and she gave him her hand for a moment. 'I hope you are getting on well.'

'Oh yes, very well,' he said cheerfully. 'I can move about a little now, indoors. I think the Derby week will see me on my legs again. And how is Miss Zembra; I suppose you have heard from her?'

And then it flashed upon her that he was assuming she knew nothing of what had occurred, for how else could he dare to talk about Sabina in this free-and-easy fashion?

'Oh yes, I hear from her frequently; she is very well, I believe. What a pleasant afternoon for going about!'

If this was not an intimation to him that he might move on she did not know what was. But he remained.

'I have found it very different since she left,' said he, with a rueful smile,—'very different indeed. I had no idea we had been such constant companions until she left. Brighton seems quite deserted now. You see, you get into the habit of meeting people in a place like this, one day being just like the day before it, and you don't notice,

perhaps, how much you are thrown together. But you find out when they leave.'

'Yes?' said Janie; which was rather cold encouragement.

'And I'm awfully sorry she went away so hurriedly,' he continued (and Janie wished he would not stare at her so uncompromisingly with his clear, hard, blue eyes). 'I don't mind telling you there was a kind of—kind of—well, something happened that might have admitted of some explanation if only she had not gone away so abruptly. I was awfully sorry—if I could have seen her for merely a couple of minutes I could have explained a lot. Yes; and there's another thing I wanted to say to her before she went back to London—well, it was talked about occasionally here—but I wanted to impress it on her—don't you think she ought to look about for some male companion—I suppose she could not afford a secretary?—but some male companion, anyway, to go with her through all those slums?'

'Miss Zembra,' said Janie distantly (for she was not going to call her 'Sabie' to *him*), 'only goes to places where she is known; besides, she can take care of herself.'

'Oh, I do not mean in that way,' he said, and he accepted her repellent attitude with much good nature; perhaps he did not notice it. 'I mean in the way of her getting sharped. I imagine she is imposed on by a whole crowd of cringing, fawning, sneaking wretches. If a man were to go with her he would let a little daylight into the whole affair.'

'You think he would get to know more about these people than she could?' Janie asked. 'I suppose you are not aware, then, that Miss Zembra is a member of the Charity Organisation Society?'

'But she is a woman.'

'A woman may have as sharp eyes as a man.'

'But she is sure to have a softer heart—and that's where the trouble comes in.'

Janie remained obdurate. Even that little bit of adroit flattery had no effect on her. And Mr. Foster, seeing that

she was not inclined for further conversation, left a friendly message for her mother, and passed on.

That evening's despatch to Sabina could not well omit all mention of this interview; but Janie had no scruples whatever about sending a distinctly garbled version.

'He seemed as cheerful and complacent as you could wish,' she wrote, amongst other things; 'and put all the blame on you for having gone away so hurriedly. Everything could have been put right by an explanation. I suppose he means he could have explained why it was absolutely necessary you should become his wife. And he was kind enough to say that Brighton felt quite lonely now that you had gone, and that he had no idea you and he had been so much together. I suppose because he had not taken the trouble to notice.'

This letter—the animus of which she well understood and could discard—set Sabina still further wondering. What explanation could he mean? And so he had been looking back over their companionship together, and perhaps valuing it a little? And she was glad that he was putting so brave a face on his disappointment; for she assumed that there must have been some disappointment: a man does not ask a woman to be his wife without having seriously thought it over and laid far-reaching plans and cherished hopes that he is anxious to have fulfilled. And, of course, so important a choice is a great honour to confer upon any girl; and one not lightly or ungratefully to be thrown aside. What explanation was it? she asked herself again and again. She knew that he was not a sentimental person; but then neither was she herself; perhaps she ought to have waited, and listened to what he had to say, and been less discourteous in her summary refusal.

It may have been this continual questioning of herself that caused Sabina, one afternoon as she was going down through Kensington Square, to pass Walter Lindsay without recognition. He had not been so blind. He had seen her a long way off; and it was as if something had suddenly grasped his heart and made it cease to beat. He did not know she had returned to London. He was not prepared. The calm and equable friendship he had promised himself

was not there with its quieting influence; and he only knew that the sight of Sabina advancing towards him—the real Sabina—here in Kensington Square—in Kensington Square that he had peopled so often with ghosts and visions of her—this actual thing bewildered him out of his senses, and he could not think what he was to say to her. How was he to account for her being in Kensington Square at all? Was some one ill that she had so suddenly come back? She would be startled and displeased at confronting him so unexpectedly?

Sabina came along, all unheeding. She was not looking at any one whom she might meet; her eyes were absorbed. And when she passed him, he was still silent, almost fearing to disturb her; but the next moment something within him took control of him, and he advanced a quick step or two.

'Miss Zembra!'

She turned with a little start; but the moment she saw who it was, there was a quick outshining of friendliness from the beautiful eyes, and a pleasant smile of welcome. She had been much harassed and worried these last few days; she had been almost alone; here was an old friend who had been kind to her many a time. And she did not know that she allowed him to retain her hand while they were mutually asking and answering the usual preliminary questions (perhaps he did not know it either); and she took no pains to conceal the pleasure with which she recognised him; and her eyes met his with a frankness that took no thought of consequences. In short, during these few seconds, her conduct was abominable, Mrs. Wygram would have said; but Mrs. Wygram was altogether forgotten in the surprise and gladness of this unexpected meeting.

'You are going down that way?' he said, looking towards the end of the Square.

'Yes. I am going down to Cornwall Gardens. It is not often I pay afternoon calls; but I am to meet an old admiral who has been of great service to me several times, and I shall have plenty of opportunity to thank him—that is, to beg for future favours.'

'May I walk as far with you?'

'If you like,' she said without hesitation, 'if it is not out of your way.'

And here he was actually walking side by side with Sabina along the Kensington Square pavement, as many and many a time he had vainly imagined and pictured to himself. And what a tragic thing it was that he could only talk to her about trivial matters—about Brighton lodging-houses, and the crowds at South Kensington of an evening, and the various gossip of the studios—when all the time he was dying to tell her of the newly-established relationship, the unalterable and perfect friendship that was to last between these two for ever and ever and evermore. Of course he could not tell her; for she knew of no other relationship—and had probably never dreamed of any; and so he had to pretend to be eagerly interested in training-ships and the like; while all the pleasant and amusing things he had been storing up for her during these many weeks had gone clean out of his head. No matter; Sabina was about as close to him as she had been in the hansom; and he was keeping step with her as well as he could; and bending towards her a little so that he could listen to her the more easily; and sometimes he succeeded in making her laugh, and her laugh was pleasant to hear. And he knew that for him thenceforth this Victoria Road would be a blessed thoroughfare; he and she together had passed underneath the overhanging trees of those front gardens; for him at least the place would be for ever haunted.

Nor even when she had passed within the hated portals of that house in Cornwall Gardens was he likely to quit the neighbourhood so long as she was there. Of course he could not wait and offer to escort her back home again, if home she was going; that would have been too significant; but he could linger unobserved until she came out, and have at least a last glimpse of her. And that was all he obtained; for on Sabina's coming out of the house she took the first cab she saw, and was driven away, he knew not whither.

But he was happy enough; nay, his heart was filled with rejoicing. Nor would he go northward by Victoria Road

and Kensington Square; the way they had come seemed to him still rich with the glory of her presence; he would not go and see how empty the thoroughfares looked. No, he went away in another direction altogether; and eventually, after many aimless turnings and wanderings, found himself towards seven o'clock out in the Addison Road neighbourhood, and at the door of the studio of an old chum of his.

This Willie Meteyard was rather celebrated in his way as having been an unconscionable number of times on the very edge of being elected to the Academy, and failing at the last moment through some unexpected combination; but he took these disappointments very equably, and worked away at his pictures of Irish peasant-life with an assiduity which brought him a fair amount of fame, and the dealers a large amount of money. He was a bachelor; and he was sitting down to a bachelor-dinner when Walter Lindsay entered. Artists as a rule are not overexacting in their needs; there was soon another plate on the table.

'What are you going to do to-night, Willie?' the visitor asked.

'I'm going with those Mowbray girls and their mother to the theatre.'

'You'll have to dress and get away immediately, I suppose?'

'Yes.'

'What a nuisance! You'd much better stop where you are; and we'll go into the studio, and have a pipe and some music.'

Now Mr. Meteyard was much fonder of music than of the theatre; and he knew that when Lindsay got into the vein, he played very well indeed, and with quite unusual feeling. Besides, Lindsay was an old friend; and the Mowbrays were mere acquaintances; the promise was not a very definite one; there was a large party going to the theatre; and he would not be missed. Finally, he wanted to stop—and he stopped.

The evening passed pleasantly enough; though by degrees the two friends ceased from music, and took mostly to smoking and lounging and chatting in the comfortable hushed studio. And, of course, Walter Lindsay had but

one subject, to which he returned again and again, by many subterfuges; and that subject, of course, was the beautiful nature and disposition of Miss Zembra, and the ennobling effect of an assured friendship with such a woman; the influence it must have on one's character, and on one's work too, making it sincere and earnest, and of a lofty aim —all of which Willie Meteyard had heard a few times before. At last he said:

'Look here, Walter, my good fellow, let's have an end of this. It's no use your trying to humbug me. All your talk about friendship is pure idiocy. I tell you I believe what you say of the girl. I suppose it's quite true. But I tell you this as well—and it's as plain as a pikestaff to every one but yourself—I tell you, you're just madly in love with her.'

CHAPTER XIV

A ROSE-DECORATED BALL

To name a thing is nothing; other people might call it love if they liked; he was content to regard it as a beautiful and ideal friendship; and he could have wished that this was the fourteenth century; and London, Florence; and that a certain chosen band of charming ladies and young gentlemen might retire to a small and fair domain without the city, there to walk in cool gardens and fragrant meadows, singing songs and telling stories, weaving garlands of flowers, and dancing to the dulcet strains of lute and viol—all to show to the world that perfect and frank good comradeship might innocently and advantageously exist between unmarried men and maidens. In the meantime, he was neither in Florence nor in the fourteenth century; and, indeed, he was too much occupied with the one and sole and consuming question as to how he should manage to see Sabina again to waste much thinking over impracticabilities.

But afternoon calls were useless, for Sabina was rarely at home in the daytime; haunting the neighbourhood of Kensington Square was tantalising beyond endurance; and not until Mrs. Wygram came back from Brighton could he hope for an invitation to spend an evening with them. Was there no other way? For this constant desire to meet her again—if only for a few minutes, just to see how she was looking, and hear her voice—banished every other thought and fancy from his brain; and he neglected his work; and his ordinary companions had but little interest for him; and London became at once a delight and a torture to him—

knowing, as he did, that Sabina was somewhere within the vast extent of it; and from morning till night he kept vainly guessing at her probable whereabouts. All this was friendship of a very exalted and devoted character, he knew; still, it was friendship.

One afternoon he went down to the house of a famous Academician, and found the mistress of the mansion at home. There were a few visitors present; and when they rose to leave he remained; he wanted to have a little private conversation with Mrs. Mellord.

'Why,' said he, when they had gone, 'from what I hear, the whole of London is coming to you on the 22d.'

'Oh no, no—only a few friends,' she said (all hostesses say the like). 'We shall be very quiet—don't you be frightened away——'

'Oh, I am coming, of course,' he said.

'I have got some pretty women,' she observed encouragingly (and she herself was charming enough, both in appearance and manner).

'You always do have pretty women at your house,' he said. 'Don't you know that other people are a little bit jealous? How do you manage it? They're not too fond of shining side by side. They like to be solitary stars. Well, now—eh—I wanted to ask you if you had sent a card to the Wygrams.'

'The Wygrams?' she repeated, with the least touch of surprise. 'I don't think I did, then.'

'Oh, but you ought,' he made bold to say (for he was on very friendly terms with this pretty Mrs. Mellord). 'Oh yes, you must—a kindness, you know—auld lang syne——'

'I should hardly have thought it was in their way,' she said, still looking rather puzzled. And then something seemed to strike her; and she regarded the young man with shrewd and demurely smiling eyes. 'I suppose you mean that Miss Zembra should be included?'

'Miss Zembra?' he answered; and he took up an Egyptian scent-burner and affected to be deeply interested in the potter's handiwork. 'Well, yes, I understand she is still living with them. I don't know that she would care to come—probably not. She would want some persuasion, I suppose,

if you were kind enough to ask her. However, if you want another pretty woman, there is one. Of course, as I say, she would have to be persuaded—she doesn't often go out—but you could tell her, for example, that she ought to go out from time to time—seeing how rich people enjoy and amuse themselves should sharpen her sympathy with those poor people she works among—you might put it that way, if you thought it worth while asking her.'

Mrs. Mellord burst out laughing

'Do you know, Mr. Lindsay, that you are a very admirable actor? Of course it is not you who want Miss Zembra to be here on the 22d. Oh, no! And your air of indifference—excellent! Do you think I have heard nothing?—with all the town talking about your infatuation for Miss Sabina!'

He reddened to the temples.

'I was not aware there were so many idiots in the world.'

'Don't be angry,' said his friend, placidly. 'They might have coupled your name with a plainer girl. Now let us understand each other. Supposing I go to Miss Zembra, and talk her over, and get her to come here, perhaps you would like to take her in to supper?'

He looked up quickly, but she did not give him time to speak.

'I suppose you would not object. Well, then, everybody says that Herr Borella is a great chum of yours. I saw him the other night, and he refused to come to me on the 22d—the flimsiest excuse you ever heard; do you think you can induce him to change his mind?'

'I know I can.'

'And will you get him to sing?'

'Certainly.'

'For, don't you see, I am not going to sacrifice the whole night to you boys and girls. I must have some little amusement for the elderly people; and I am going to have distinct intervals between the dances, and have music—songs, I mean, for no one listens to anything else. Well, then, I have got Madame Secchi, and Angelica Russell, and Isidore, and one or two others; and I want your friend Borella as well.'

'Oh, that's all right,' he said promptly.

'You really think you will get him to sing for me?'

'I'll make him sing.'

'Because,' said pretty Mrs. Mellord, gravely, and she regarded the young man with eyes that meant a good deal, 'in that case, I think out of sheer gratitude I must do my best to persuade Miss Zembra.'

The 22d was a long way off yet, however; and in the interval the Wygrams came home from Brighton. During this time he encountered the sympathetic Janie occasionally; but saw very little of Sabina, who was busy with her multifarious duties; so that all the more he looked forward to the evening on which he was to meet her at Mrs. Mellord's. And always with the tacit assumption that he was to have the monopoly of her society on that occasion. Had it not been so at his own house on that memorable night? Sabina was his companion all the way through; at supper she had sat on his right hand and talked almost exclusively to him; in the studio the others were free to dance, or listen to music, or amuse themselves as they chose; Sabina and he were apart and together. And as it was then, so it would be now; for who else had such a claim on her?

And at last came the night of the ball; and it was the very height of the London season; and as carriage after carriage drove up to Mrs. Mellord's house, the crowd on the pavement had more or less distant glimpses of very distinguished people indeed — a generally recognised face causing a little murmur of comment—and of the less-known womenfolk who stepped along under the awning in the lightest and palest of summer cloaks and hoods. And pleasant it was on this hot June night to pass into the spacious hall of white and black marble; and fresh and cool looked the tall ferns that went all the way round the walls; and there was a grateful flashing of the central fountain, where a ghost-white alabaster swan floated motionless in the middle of a miniature lake. But from the hall upwards and onwards there was no decoration but roses. Ropes of roses adorned the staircase; festoons of roses hung above the doors; masses of roses gave colour to the pale gold ball room; and on the supper-table—as yet concealed from the

public eye—lay a bed of red roses from end to end. Everywhere there was a scent of roses; and a sound of music too, for the dancing had begun; and pretty Mrs. Mellord, at the head of the staircase, was already becoming anxious that the people should disperse a little, and not crowd so obstinately round the ballroom door.

Walter Lindsay was not in that ballroom. No; he was in the spacious hall below, lounging about with Willie Meteyard, and pretending to listen to him. The subject of their talk was etching, ordinarily a sufficiently attractive topic for most artists; and Meteyard was most enthusiastic about a wonder-working press he had just purchased. Somehow or other, however, Walter Lindsay's attention was but intermittent. He looked anxious. He kept glancing towards the wide-open doorway, and to the brilliant crowd that came slowly pouring in. And at last, with a sudden 'See you by and by,' he abruptly left his companion and made for a certain small group that had just arrived.

Sabina (so tall she seemed; and to him she appeared to be enveloped in a cloud of white gauze—but that was because he had no eyes for anything but her face and the possible look of welcome he might find there) was apparently a little surprised to meet him.

'In London still?' she said, in her direct way. 'Why are you not in the country, at work?'

He stammered some excuse.

'And you might well ask what brings *us* here,' she added, with a smile; 'but Janie wanted to see the roses.'

They passed into the cloak-room. He was very nervous while awaiting them. He wanted to get possession of Sabina from the first—to establish a right of companionship that no one could interfere with. And what if they were to be separated on the crowded staircase, or if she were to be snatched away from him on her entrance into the rooms above? It suddenly occurred to him that he was in a manner helpless. In his own home, with Sabina as his guest, he could do what he liked. He could choose her seat for her, take her hither and thither, and generally assume charge of her. But here, in another person's house,

he had no such control; all sorts of untoward accidents might happen; wild beasts (in the shape of strangers wanting introductions) would be waiting upstairs to devour her. And what had he come for if Sabina were to be spirited away?

However, when the women reappeared, it was very evident that Sabina had no intention of ignoring the claims of old friendship. She came forward to him quite frankly, appeared to take it for granted he was waiting for them, and went up the staircase with him, these two together, and Janie looking on with marked approval.

'I wish Mr. Foster could see them now,' she said in an undertone to her mother.

'You know,' Sabina said to her companion, 'we are going away quite early. I cannot have all the good that Brighton did to Mrs. Wygram undone again. Wasn't it kind of her to take all the trouble about bringing us here to-night? But Janie was so anxious to see the pretty rooms; and then Mrs. Mellord is a very persuasive woman—when she sets her mind on a thing——'

'Oh,' said he, 'I will take you where you will see everything without getting crushed. I know you don't care much about dancing, Miss Zembra, and I don't either; why, I detest it—in this hot weather—in a crowd——'

But they were now arrived at the head of the staircase. Mrs. Mellord was not much surprised to find Walter Lindsay appear at the same time with Miss Zembra; and she gave both of them and the Wygrams a pleasant greeting; only she took occasion, as she pressed Mr. Lindsay's hand slightly, to say, 'Borella is here, and has already sung twice. You are a very good boy.'

Now as Walter Lindsay was familiar with this house, and as all the rooms on this floor were *en suite*, he found no difficulty in taking his little party by a roundabout way to a corner where they could have a commanding view. And a very pretty sight it was: the pale-hued walls, the brilliant lights, the masses and ropes and festoons of roses; young English girls showing further roses in their cheeks, their eyes vivid with the animation of a waltz; dowagers gorgeous in velvet and satin and diamonds; here and there in the

'general circle,' if one may use the phrase, the resplendent costume of a dusky Indian prince, or the quieter garments of a group of Chinese officials looking on with impassive stare. Perhaps, indeed, the 'general circle' was more interesting to the ordinary observer than the industrious young men and maidens who were engaged in the active business of the evening; for there were many famous folk here; and, luckily for Lindsay's companions, his acquaintance was not confined to mere painters and poets and people of that kind. However, they were not suffered to remain long in this quiet corner. The son of the house had espied them; a quadrille was being formed; he brought along a partner, and introduced him to Janie. Janie was a good girl, and told no lie; only she threw a little despairing glance towards Sabina.

'Won't you come in, Sabie?' she said.

'Will you?' said Walter Lindsay quickly.

'Oh yes,' was the placid answer.

And so before he knew what he was about he found himself engaged to dance with Sabina; and quite inadvertently he took her hand so as to put her in proper position; and his heart was beating pretty quickly; and the music that had now begun made a fervour in his brain, so that the little speeches he made to her were rather incoherent. Fortunately they were 'sides;' and in the period of waiting, Sabina looked on calm and bland and placid. When it came to their turn she went through the various evolutions with a simplicity and ease and grace that entirely surprised him, and wrought him a more deadly woe than ever. Was it her beautiful figure, then, that caused her slightest movement to appear so fine and finished? And then she was so gentle and dignified in her self-possession; and Janie's eyes, as he could see, were full of admiring pride; she seemed to be saying, 'Is not our beautiful Sabie perfect in everything she does?' And, of course, he pretended to have forgotten the figures in order to have information given him in an undertone; and he rather lingered in letting go her hand when they returned to their places; and he, too, spoke to her in an undertone, as if to shut away the outer world. But alas! this close companionship could not last for ever;

the music and the dancing ceased, and he had to take her back to Mrs. Wygram. It was Perdita he was thinking of, and Florizel's speech to her: 'What you do still betters what is done. . . . When you do dance, I wish you a wave o' the sea, that you might ever do nothing but that.' Only this was rather a tall and stately Perdita, though her manner was gracious enough.

Madame Secchi was now singing the 'Casta Diva' air from *Norma;* but he did not listen attentively; he was busy with the fear that that officious young Mellord would presently be bringing along some partner and stealing Sabina away from him. And he was resolved that no such thing should occur. So he charged them not to move from their present position; and slipped away through the crowd and reached his hostess.

'Mrs. Mellord,' said he, 'are you going to be awfully good to me?'

'I always am,' was the prompt reply.

'Yes; but this time especially?'

'What is it?'

'Miss Zembra and the Wygrams are not going to stay late, and I want to show them the supper-room; I've heard about the roses. May I take them in?'

'The candles are not lit yet.'

'Oh, but there will be some kind of light.'

'Very well, then.' And then she looked at him with laughing but friendly eyes. 'Promise to be grateful to me all your life. I will let you give them supper now, if you can find any.'

'No; may I?'

'But get the servants to put the table straight—don't forget that.'

And right gladly and swiftly he went back to his friends; the music had not yet finished; Sabina was still there.

'Come along,' said he, 'I am commissioned by Mrs. Mellord to take you into the supper-room—before any one else goes in—come along!'

And then he bundled them away, and guided them across the upper hall, and opened the ponderous rosewood door, and ushered them into this long, dimly-lit chamber.

But even these few lamps showed what a beautiful room it was—the abundance of flowers, the silver candelabra, the crystal and china making the table very prétty indeed. Then it was cool and quiet and mysterious; there was no servant of any kind near; they were as children who had stolen into some forbidden place. Of course the women-folk would not hear of his attempting to get them any supper. Would he disarrange that beautiful table? They could get some refreshment, if they wanted any, in the other room.

Then said Janie, 'Mother, Sabie is tired after her long day's work. Let her stop here—in the cool. We will go back and look at the dancing.'

Sabina was nothing loth; this room was indeed much less hot than the others; he had got her a comfortable chair; and, when she had time, she enjoyed laziness luxuriously. What did she talk to him about? It seemed a matter of little concern to her. He was all eagerness to interest her—about a dozen different subjects; but she answered as if the mysterious lights, and the cool atmosphere, and the scent of the roses were enough for her. She lay a little back in her chair; the solitary diamond in the slender necklace round her throat flashed from time to time; she never raised her eyes to his; she seemed content —and blandly indifferent.

But there was a growing wildness in his brain; at any moment she might carelessly rise and signify her wish to return to the ballroom; and he could not control her going. He took a rose from the bed of roses.

'Miss Zembra, will you give me this rose?' he said in rather a low voice.

In an instant she seemed to be startled into half-consciousness, and to recollect where she was—and what Mrs. Wygram would probably say of her. The next moment she had risen and taken the rose and placed it gently back on the table.

'We must not rob Mrs. Mellord,' she said with perfect quietude. 'And now, shall we go back?'

'I would wait ten years to get that rose from you,' he said, for this madness was still in his brain.

Perhaps she did not hear. She preceded him calmly to the door; and there, indeed, she lingered for half a second until he rejoined her; and together, as if nothing had happened, they returned to the Wygrams. But he was very pale; and all this thing around him was phantasmal—the din and splendour were alike bewildering; he looked on, but his eyes were blind.

Sabina began to question Mrs. Wygram about going, and this somewhat recalled him to himself. Nay, she spoke to him too, and with no studied coldness, but rather with a certain timidity. Had she heard, and yet was not angry? Or was it that she was too gentle to be angry?—she would rather pretend not to have heard at all?

Very soon the Wygrams and Sabina left, and for him the rose-scented ball was over. He returned no more to those brilliant rooms, with their blazing candelabra and beautiful dresses and gay music. He put on his thin summer overcoat and went away listlessly—and yet with a kind of excitement in his brain—through the dim gaslit streets—down by Gloucester Road, and Cornwall Gardens, and back by Victoria Road, and so, and stealthily, through Kensington Square. The lights were already out in the well-known house. And then he wandered away up in the Notting Hill direction until he reached his own home; and there he went into the studio, and turned up the gas, and threw off his coat, and sat down. What had happened? And right well he knew; no further disguise or pretence was possible now; his inmost soul had spoken—to himself, if not to her.

CHAPTER XV

AN ALLIANCE

ONE morning Sabina and Janie were engaged on an errand in Richmond Road, Old Brompton, when a hansom cab that had come rattling along behind them was pulled up, and the occupant stepped out. Sabina happened to turn her head.

'Mr. Foster!'

And, indeed, it was Mr. Foster—brisk, smiling, complaisant; very smartly dressed and gloved, too, though the tall hat made him look a little bit unfamiliar.

'This is a stroke of luck,' said he. 'I was driving down to the sports at Lillie Bridge, little expecting to have this pleasure.'

'Oh, but you can't tell how glad I am to see you able to get about again,' she said, with great earnestness. 'Indeed, indeed, I am very glad!'

'There is not much to boast of yet,' he said lightly. 'I don't think I should like to back myself to run the Open Quarter Mile in forty-eight seconds. That was done on Saturday at this very place. But we are getting on. And at any rate a hansom is more comfortable than a Bath-chair. I am just making the fortune of the London cabbies at present. Well, now, I won't detain you, for I saw you were walking quickly; but I want you to tell me if I may call at Kensington Square—to make your acquaintance, you know.'

'To make my acquaintance?' she repeated; she did not understand.

'Why, yes,' he continued cheerfully. 'You've only

known me as a cripple—in a Bath-chair and a pot hat. I want to introduce myself in a new character. May I come to see you—and Mrs. Wygram?'

'I am sure we shall be very pleased indeed,' Sabina answered, with evident sincerity. 'Why, you don't understand—it is like getting well oneself to see you as you are now. Don't you feel very happy about it? I do.'

Her sympathy was exceedingly frank, and her pleasure on witnessing this transformation obvious enough. Indeed, in her surprise and gratification over this sudden encounter, she had entirely forgotten the little tentative embassy that Mr. Foster's mother had undertaken; and when he asked her to say on which day he might call at Kensington Square, she instantly named the following afternoon.

'Sabie,' her companion remonstrated, 'you will be at the Charity Organisation!'

'I shall be home by half-past five,' was the answer, 'and very glad of a cup of tea—because sometimes the proceedings are not quite unanimous.'

'What?' Mr. Foster struck in. 'You don't mean to say that those good people have an occasional bickering? Well, I should like to be there—to lend you a helping hand.'

Sabina laughed.

'What is the matter?' he asked innocently.

'I think you would make a strange figure at a meeting of the Charity Organisation Society,' she remarked.

'I've got an English tongue in my head—I could speak my mind,' he said, bluntly. 'However, I see you want to be off. To-morrow at half-past five, then.'

And he got into the hansom again and drove away; while they turned out of this thoroughfare and made for the Fulham Road. As they were going through the Boltons, Sabina said, 'I am so glad we met him. I feel quite happy about it.'

'I don't see why his recovering from an accident should be of so much importance to you,' Janie said, rather coldly.

'You forget that I was mainly the cause of the accident,' Sabina answered, in her gentle way.

'We will not discuss that, for we are not likely to agree.'

And then Janie added sharply, 'And look at the way he occupies his time, now that he can get about again—driving in hansoms to places of amusement—his only thought for himself. Why, Sabie, I can't understand the interest you take in that man. There never were two human beings so entirely dissimilar in everything. When I think of the life he leads—sports and pleasures and pastimes from week's end to week's end, and the life that you lead—working hard, and all for other people——'

'Janie, Janie,' Sabina said, with a laugh; 'why will you be so violently prejudiced? Haven't I told you a hundred times that what is right for one person is not necessarily right for every one? Different people have different hobbies, and I happen to have mine. Do you think if I could ride like Mr. Foster, and play cricket, and so on, I should not be intensely interested in those things?'

'Oh yes,' said Janie, with cutting irony; 'I can quite imagine Sabina Zembra a champion slayer of pigeons. Two to one, bar one. That's just like you, Sabie!'

When Mr. Fred Foster called at Kensington Square the following afternoon, he was even more scrupulously neat in his attire; and the slight lameness from which he still suffered served as an excuse for the display of a walking-stick, the head of which was of elaborately carved jade. There was no embarrassment about him over this his first visit to the house; he was most pleasant to Mrs. Wygram (Janie had gone out). He was anxious to hear from Sabina of the proceedings at the Charitable Organisation Society; and he facetiously remarked that, although he had intended to introduce himself as a new acquaintance, it was impossible to keep up the pretence—he preferred to acknowledge that he had fallen among old friends.

'Well, you know,' he said, 'the memory of a holiday-place and the time you spent there is always far finer than the thing itself; and fortunately so. Don't you ever think of those mornings at Brighton, Miss Zembra—out at the end of the pier, you know; the fresh wind and clear skies and the music; the young people about; and you beginning to think that when lunch-time comes along you will be quite ready? Very jolly mornings they were, weren't

they? And when you look back at them, they seem very bright somehow—a poetical halo, I suppose? And that,' he continued, warming to his subject, for he was evidently bent on making a good impression, in his self-complacent way,—'that is what I should like to have in my composition —just enough poetry to make things look a little better than they are. It's no great harm to go on thinking all your geese are swans, so long as you don't find it out. Of course, I shouldn't want to have as much poetry as would drive one into publishing it, and running the racket of the critics, and becoming miserable if the public wouldn't look at you. Oh no; I should like to be able to take a fairly roseate view of things, but for my own use; I shouldn't care a rap what other people thought of them. As for writing real poetry, now—well, I don't know—I suppose it may be interesting to be a famous person—in your own life-time, I mean—people stare at you, if that is any good to you—but beyond that what is there in fame? I don't see that it would be of any advantage to me that people should remember my name two hundred years after my death.'

His *apologia pro vita suâ* would sometimes come in thus in the most unexpected fashion; but indeed it was unnecessary, for Sabina had a wide experience of diverse modes of life, and she was tolerant to a degree. If he seemed to spend a good deal of his time at Lord's and at the Oval, why should he not, on those pleasant summer afternoons? He was harming no one as far as she knew.

He did not overstay his welcome; and it was clear that on this first visit he had managed to somewhat mitigate Mrs. Wygram's prejudice against him; for it was with no great asperity that she said, when he had gone, 'Sabie, don't you think it just a little awkward that Mr. Foster should come here?'

'Why, then?' the girl said, with some surprise.

'Well, you know it is not such a long time since he asked you to be his wife—indirectly, at least. And a refusal is supposed to mean something. I should not wonder, now, if you encourage him to call, and receive him in that frank way you have with everybody, he may begin to

imagine that you would not be sorry if he repeated his offer.'

Sabina reddened a little, but she said; 'Dear Mrs. Wygram, you must not put such fancies into innocent people's heads. I am sure he is thinking of no such thing. He is as busy in his own way as I am in mine, especially now that he can get about again.'

Busy as he was, however, Mr. Foster found time to pay several visits to Kensington Square; and he was very straightforward in asking Sabina when she was likely to be found at home. He seemed exceedingly desirous of establishing affectionate relations between her and the old lady in Buckinghamshire. One day he brought with him a magnificent basket of strawberries.

'This is a little present from my mother, Miss Zembra,' he said; 'and she wants you to know that they are her own growing—of course she is rather proud of them.'

'That is very kind, I am sure,' Sabina said. 'Will you give her my best thanks, and say how good it was of her to think of me?'

'If you wouldn't mind sending her a note yourself, Miss Zembra?' he suggested. 'It would please her so much.'

'Oh yes, I will,' Sabina said at once; 'give me the address.'

And so the brief note was written and despatched to Buckinghamshire. Of course it needed no reply; but all the same the reply came, in the shape of a very long and affectionate letter, in which the old lady ventured to hope that she had done no harm by a certain indiscreet disclosure made at Brighton. Moreover, enclosed in the letter was a photograph of the garden where the strawberries were grown, with Mrs. Foster seated in an arm-chair, and the old gentleman, scissors in hand, standing at the door of the vine-houses. It was a pretty and peaceful-looking picture, and Sabina, in acknowledging the receipt, said so. What, then, should arrive—even by return of post—but an invitation, a general invitation, to Sabina to come down to this peaceful retreat whenever she felt tired, or ill, or depressed, with abundant assurances that she would be treated with the most considerate care. A more than

friendly letter, nicely worded; and Mr. Fred Foster was good enough to endorse that invitation eagerly, and to say the old lady's heart would just be filled with joy if Miss Zembra would take her at her word and go down to see her when the opportunity arose.

Another point that he went back upon again and again was the necessity of Miss Zembra introducing a little more amusement into her life. He had nothing to say against the self-appointed labours that she had devoted herself to; only that she was too assiduous. All work and no play, he insisted, was the right thing for no one, and he appealed to Mrs. Wygram. Why should not Miss Zembra have gone up to see the Eton and Harrow match at Lord's—for, indeed, he had been desirous of escorting the whole party thither?

'But I find my amusement in my work, such as it is,' Sabina said good-naturedly. 'I don't know that I should care to sit and look on at a number of boys knocking a ball about. Perhaps I might, though. Young English lads, healthy and well-built and active, are always nice to look at. And that reminds me I am going down to see my boys on the *Arethusa* and *Chichester* next Wednesday; it is the annual inspection. Now, is not that a sufficient holiday, Mr. Foster? And I am going with a clear conscience; I shall not have to drag either Mrs. Wygram or Janie with me; Mrs. Tremenheere is going, and I have merely to pick her up at Charing Cross Pier. Now, is not that enough of a holiday? A pleasant sail down the river; luncheon on board the *Arethusa;* watching the boys go through their drill, presenting the prizes, and then back to town?'

And not only did Mr. Fred Foster express approval, but also he was curious to learn further and minute details about this projected excursion. What was the institution? Who were the managers? Who were likely to be there on Wednesday? How were invitations come at?

'You know,' said he, 'if my little arrangement about the Leicestershire Cup comes off I shall become a subscriber.'

'I think we'd rather have the money now,' Sabina said, 'and then you won't risk losing it.'

'But it's out of the profits—if any—that the subscription would come,' he then explained.

Soon, however, he was to be of assistance to her in a more immediate way. One evening about half-past six he strolled along to Kensington Square on the off-chance that she had returned home somewhat before dinner-time: a message from the old lady in Buckinghamshire was the ostensible excuse for his calling. He had scarcely entered the Square than he perceived her at the farther corner of it coming north, so he leisurely went on to meet her.

'Oh, Mr. Foster, I am glad to see you,' she said in her frank way; 'I want to see if you can give me some help.'

'You may be sure I will if I can,' he said cheerfully.

'It's rather a sad story,' she said, plunging into the matter at once. 'A poor widow I know has an only son, a lad about fifteen, and he has got into trouble. It isn't merely the loss of his wages for the moment—though that is something to her—it is his future, and the difficulty of getting another situation for him, that is worrying the poor woman. This is how it happened. He is employed in a livery-stable-keeper's place down in Earl's Court. He had to take a whip into the clerk's office to leave it there. Well, a customer had been paying a bill, and the change was two shillings; but he had neglected to pick up the change; and he and the clerk came to the door of the office, for they were talking together. The boy goes past them into the office to leave the whip; he sees the florin lying on the counter; the temptation is too great, he slips it into his pocket. Then the man remembers he has not picked up his change; turns and finds it is gone; the boy is challenged, and at once gives up the florin. Well, of course, there is no excuse; but most people have done things they are sorry for; and I am certain this boy has nothing of the inborn thief in him—it was a sudden temptation, and he gave way. There was a talk of prosecution; I went to his master and he consented to stop that; only he insisted on dismissing the lad; so that there he is now without a situation and without a character or reference. Can you get some kind-hearted man to overlook this one slip and give the boy another trial?'

She had an admirably business-like way of putting a case; perhaps she was used to it. As for Fred Foster, he paused; had he not always been telling her that she needed a man's shrewdness and firmness to assist her—that she was always running the risk of being imposed upon?

'If I could sēe the lad,' said he, 'I think I could tell by the look of him whether his story will wash.'

'Oh, but he confesses!'

'Well, I could tell whether I should care to ask somebody to give him a fresh start.'

'Would you mind coming and seeing him now?' she said promptly. 'His mother lives not ten minutes' walk from here, and he is at home just now, I know.'

'But if you are kept late for dinner?'

'Oh, that is nothing!' she said cheerfully. 'They never wait for me; that's all right.'

So they set out—she walking at a studiously moderate pace; and he seemed a little proud and pleased to have so fair a companion. And how did he entertain her? Well, there had been a smoking concert at Mildenhall, in Suffolk, given by certain 'bookies' to their friends who were at the Newmarket race-meeting; and he had been present on this particularly festive occasion; and he gave her a fairly vivid and humorous account of the evening. He was very honest; he never sought to conceal anything about himself or his companions; and they seemed to have been pretty gay at the White Hart Hotel. In the middle of the story Sabina bowed to some one passing; and Mr. Foster, raising his hat, as in duty bound, merely glanced at the stranger.

'That is Mr. Lindsay, the artist, whom I have spoken to you about,' said Sabina.

'Oh, indeed,' he said indifferently. 'An odd-looking creature—gaunt, white-faced, and black-haired—seems to have come out of Byron's poems—those artists always do like to look singular.'

'But you must not say anything like that about Mr. Lindsay,' said Sabina gently, 'for he is a particular friend of mine—of ours.'

When they reached the widow woman's scantily-furnished lodgings, the peccant youth seemed almost paralysed with

fear; he imagined that this appearance of a stranger could only mean prosecution, with its unknown horrors. But Fred Foster speedily reassured him. After a sharp scanning of the boy's face, he said, 'Look here, my lad, you've had a narrow escape, and I hope it will be a warning to you all your life. This lady has told me the whole story; and I think I can get you a situation where you will have a fair trial—only it will be out of town——'

'Oh, he will not mind that, sir,' the mother interposed quickly, 'if only he can get another chance. Poor lad, he feels it awful, sir.'

'Well, if you mean to keep on the square,' he said, still addressing the boy, 'I'll see what I can do. Get your kit together, and meet me at Victoria Station to-morrow morning at 10.40. Will you remember?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I will take you down to Epsom, and get you a place there, where nothing will be known of what has happened. The rest is for yourself; you will have a fair chance of getting on.'

'Yes, sir, thank you, sir.' The boy was too frightened to say more.

'Well, now, that is very kind of you to take so much trouble,' Sabina said, when they were come out again; 'to go away down to Epsom——'

'Don't give me unnecessary credit, Miss Zembra,' he said at once. 'Going down to Epsom never comes amiss to me—I can always put in a day in that quarter, sometimes to my own advantage. And I will get your stable-boy a place easily enough; poor young devil, he seems frightened out of his wits. I suppose his mother has been nagging at him. What a fearful thing it would be if everything was to be treasured up against us, and no forgiveness possible. I don't mean you,' he added hastily, 'I was talking about men. And—and—did I tell you how we wound up the evening at Mildenhall?'

Sabina thought he had not; and so—he discoursing the while on these pretty goings-on—they walked equably back to Kensington Square.

It was only a day or two after this occurrence that

Walter Lindsay happened to meet Janie Wygram, who with her mother had gone to pay an afternoon call at an artist's house. Wandering about the big studio, as all of them did, he had little difficulty in getting the chance of saying a few words to Janie by herself.

'I suppose,' he said rather diffidently, 'that it was the Mr. Foster you told me of whom I saw walking with Miss Zembra the other day?'

Janie instantly turned her sympathetic and troubled eyes towards him and then lowered them.

'I did not know you had seen them,' she said; 'but no doubt it was Mr. Foster. Sabie told me he had gone with her to see some people she's interested in. Well, what do you think of him?'

She hoped he would say something bitter and savage.

'I only caught a moment's glimpse of him,' he answered evasively. 'He goes a good deal to Kensington Square?'

He endeavoured to speak in an indifferent way; but Janie was not deceived.

'Yes, he has been there several times of late;' and there was a little touch of indignation in her tone as she added, 'and do you know how he has acquired such an influence over Sabie? Well, I'll tell you—it's his impudence—pure impudence. Sabie has never been treated in that free and easy way before; and she doesn't understand it, and gets bewildered; and thinks there must be something in him because he is cool and complacent and masterful towards her. And to think that Sabie—a girl like Sabie—should be imposed upon by pure impudence!'

But Janie Wygram could scarcely be regarded as a dispassionate judge.

CHAPTER XVI

A BETROTHAL

AMONG decorous people it is considered that an unmarried young lady should not drive alone in a hansom; but Sabina was a very busy woman; and besides she considered herself elderly; so it was in a hansom that on this brilliant July morning she drove along to Charing Cross Pier. Almost at the same moment Mrs. Tremenheere arrived in her carriage; and the two ladies went down to the special steamer that was awaiting the party. As they stepped on board, the first person to come forward and greet Sabina was Mr. Fred Foster.

Now Mr. Foster, though his sympathies in certain directions were distinctly limited, had a good deal of natural sagacity; and instantly he saw—from the look of surprise, or more than surprise—in Sabina's face—that in planning this artful little stratagem he had made a mistake. And as quickly as he could he made his apology.

'I did not know until last night,' he said, 'that I had secured an invitation; for I have been down in Buckinghamshire—my first trip there since—since the little accident. And you have told me so much about these training-ships, Miss Zembra—I thought it would be a good opportunity—I was very glad when I found I was to have the chance of seeing them.'

Sabina somewhat formally introduced him to Mrs. Tremenheere; and he was very humble and civil in getting them seats where the awning would shelter them from the sun; and there was no suggestion in his manner that he had come hither with any dark design. Moreover, Sabina

was not one quick to take offence; perhaps it was really his interest in the *Arethusa* and the *Chichester* that had prompted his coming; and if so, did not he deserve a little encouragement and friendliness? He did not in any way whatever seek to thrust his society on the two ladies; but he was within call. And as Mrs. Tremenheere was devoting her whole and rapt attention to the Bishop of Sudbury—who was discoursing to her of the iniquity of spending money on orchids—Fred Foster came gradually to be Sabina's attendant and companion, when no one else claimed her.

It was a very pleasant sail down the river; flags flying; a juvenile brass band playing from time to time in the forward part of the steamer; the lads on the training-ships that they passed giving them a hearty cheer as they went by.

'If helping in a good work were always as enjoyable as this, there would be lots of it. I feel very virtuous indeed,' he remarked cheerfully.

'I feel very serious,' was her rejoinder, 'for they have fixed on me to give away the prizes; and though I get on very well among the boys when they are by themselves, I don't like having a lot of spectators looking on.'

'I wish I could be of any assistance to you,' he said (and Mrs. Tremenheere was entirely given over to her dear bishop; he could address himself directly, if modestly and respectfully, to Sabina's eyes). 'I feel myself such a useless creature in the world whenever I meet you. Ah, I wish you heard my mother speak of you, Miss Zembra. It was Miss Zembra this and Miss Zembra that, all the time I was down. I think she would consent to be ill if she thought you would come and tend her a little. She was talking about a poor woman—an imaginary woman—lying sick and hopeless and friendless; and she said that to such a poor creature, when you went into the room, your face must appear to be the face of an angel. And she hasn't forgotten your promise to go and see her——'

Sabina looked up in surprise.

'Perhaps there wasn't quite a promise,' he said quickly; 'but I fancy that in her case the wish was father to the

thought. Oh yes; and she has settled upon the room that you are to have when you go down—it is a curious little box, all by itself; but it overlooks the garden, and it is very quiet, and she says you will be so much the better for absolute rest and quiet after your hard work in London.'

'I am sure she is very kind,' Sabina was bound to say.

'I hadn't quite such a good time with the Pater,' her companion continued with a rueful smile. 'No, he was rather rough on me. He did not think much of my invention as likely to increase the sum of human happiness.'

A glance of inquiry asked him to explain.

'Oh, didn't I tell you? Did you not hear of my invention?' he said. 'Well, it was in this way. You see, after you left Brighton, it was pretty slow down there for me, and I had to do a good deal of steady thinking all by myself. And then it was that an idea occurred to me which will enable me to go down to the latest ages as a benefactor of mankind. You know how awkward it is for a lady, when she is riding alone in the country, to mount her horse by herself—supposing she has to get down to tighten the girths—and there is no stile or gate handy. Well, now, my invention is a small ladder of rope that can easily be folded up and fastened to the saddle, and there she is independent! She has neither to trust herself to the clumsiness of some country lout nor walk along to the nearest cottage for the loan of a chair; she can get down or up for herself as she pleases. And would you believe it—the Pater saw nothing in that idea to add to the gaiety of nations; and when I talked to him about Galileo, and Sir Walter Raleigh, and George Stephenson, he used the most reprehensible language. Great discoveries are always treated like that. It isn't until after we are dead that the public find out how much they owe to us.'

'I am afraid you try the old gentleman's patience a little,' she said, venturing to look up at him.

'But what am I to do?' he said. 'Begin and work some of those farms? I could not make as much out of them as the present tenants, and they're all skating on the edge of bankruptcy. He thinks I ought to do something; and I want to know what I am to do.'

'Are there no beggars at your gate?' Sabina said gently.

'There are,' he answered with cheerful promptitude; 'and what's more, there will be beggars all over the place if farming doesn't become more profitable. But don't say anything against me this time, Miss Zembra. Surely I'm engaged in a good and charitable work at the present moment? I'm actually going down to have luncheon on board the *Arethusa*.'

And this sardonic self-depreciation of his pleased Sabina a good deal more than any affected interest or other hypocrisy; he seemed to be constantly saying to her, 'Well, I'm not much of a fellow; but you are very good-natured, you won't be too hard.'

A right brave sight was that that met their eyes when they reached their destination; for the yards of the great vessel were manned by near a thousand lads and boys; and loud and long was the cheering that greeted the visitors. And then, when they had got on board and began to look round the ship, it was but natural that Mr. Foster should remain with the small party whom he had accompanied on the way down; and, therefore, when the crowd went below for lunch, he assumed the right of attending upon the two ladies, and very assiduously and cheerfully did he execute the task. Mrs. Tremenheere was rather pleased with the young man. And she was interested in him; for she had heard of the accident, and of Sabina's care of him subsequently. She thought he was rather good-looking, and distinctly well-dressed; and if he carried his frankness of manner to the verge of a certain cool audacity, she reflected that Sabina and he had been thrown so much into each other's society that now he probably regarded her in the light of an old friend.

After lunch the visitors went on deck again, and the business of the day began. Very proud indeed was Sabina over the smart and seaman-like way in which the lads went through their drill; and she spied out here and there amongst them a particular favourite of her own; and what officer could check the return glances of recognition? Of course she wore the silver anchor at her neck. And she was as pleased at the proficiency of these young sailors as

if she had trained them all herself; and she was glad that the people clapped their hands when something particularly prompt was done; and she made bold to ask Mr. Foster if the country should not be grateful to an institution that took the neglected boys of London and turned them into fine, smart, healthy-looking, bright-eyed fellows, of whom England might one day be in urgent need. Then came her own share in the programme—the distribution of the prizes and medals; and as each blushing recipient came forward—the best swimmer, the most popular boy, the smartest lad aloft, and so forth—Sabina managed to say a kindly word or two to him as she put the prize into his hand or pinned the medal on his breast. And of course Mr. Foster was at her side all this time; and perhaps his little underhand jokes rather tended to give her confidence; anyhow her fingers did not tremble much as she pinned on the medals; and her eyes—that could express approval very well indeed—said as much as her words.

'Bravo, Johnny; you've done it again,' she said to one of the prize-winners; and she turned to Fred Foster, 'That is one of my own boys.'

Indeed, Sabina was so highly pleased with the success of the whole of the day's performance that, when they had seen the last of the boat-racing, and were returning to town again on board the steamer, she was in a far more animated mood than Mr. Foster had ever seen before; and she was particularly gracious to himself. He had been her companion, in a way; he had stood by her, through that public ceremony; and now that it was all over, it was comfortable to sit here in idleness, and listen to his half-facetious comments about men and things. And what should hinder him from taking up that same subject he had been harping on so much of late, and giving it a more immediate and personal application? An early opportunity arrived. Mrs. Tremenheere went below to have some tea, her bishop accompanying her. Sabina did not care for any; she preferred to remain on deck. And then it was that Fred Foster renewed his prayer that Sabina should not give herself so wholly up to these charitable labours of hers—that she should introduce a little amusement into her life.

It was a roundabout way of placing an offer of marriage before a young lady; but it was not an unskilful one. There was no startling suddenness about it. Sabina found herself listening to an argument that seemed to be pervaded by sound common sense. All work and no play, he said, was just as bad as all play and no work; the first was her case, the second his; wouldn't it be a better and wholesomer arrangement if he could share her work, and she take some part in his amusements? It was quite gradually that she came to understand what he meant—that they should join their two lives so as to arrive at this fair compromise between pleasure and duty; and she listened with her eyes cast down, and with many rapid fancies running through her head. There was not much sentiment expressed in this proposal; but then she did not consider herself a sentimental person. Was there not, on the other hand, instead of sentiment, a certain reasonableness and fitness? More than once she had found herself in need of a man's support and guidance; while (for there was no austerity in her nature) a little holiday-making now and again might gladden life up somewhat. She listened in silence, perhaps afraid to understand his meaning too clearly; but presently his speech became plain enough.

'You know my mother went to see you at Brighton, Miss Zembra,' he said, and his eyes were fixed on the deck, and he spoke in an undertone, for there were many people about. 'That was foolish on my part. An ambassador is no good. And even here—when I have the chance—I can only say bits of things. But I have been thinking it over a good deal, and a partnership between us seems reasonable; and of course that partnership could only mean marriage. I ought to tell you what I think of you; but I can't praise you to your face; besides, Mrs. Tremenheere may be up again any minute. But I think we might have "a real good time," as the Yankees say; and I should be tremendously interested in all you are doing, and lend you a hand when there was a chance; and then, when you are overfagged and deserve a day's holiday-making, you might leave me to engineer that with a fair amount of confidence. I would live anywhere you liked; I haven't many friends

in London; and you don't seem to go out much; when we went pleasuring it would be in the country. There's Goodwood, now; wouldn't it be fine to get you away from those slums, and run down to Brighton for a week, and get hold of a dogcart and a stout little cob? There's the Mater too—wouldn't she welcome you? And if you want quiet, that's the place; and shouldn't I be willing to play good boy then? Sabina—is it to be "Yes?"'

She looked up for a second, timid and hesitating.

'No,' he said quickly, 'if you are afraid to say "Yes" on so short a notice, say nothing. Think over it. Will you?'

She nodded slightly, with her eyes still cast down. And then he said eagerly, 'But this you must promise—to take no one into your confidence. Will you promise to make your decision yourself? Oh, I know what will happen if you take advice. Your people at Lancaster Gate hate the sight of me. I don't wonder at it, and I don't resent it. Perhaps I shouldn't myself like having anybody planked in my house like that. If you ask them, they will say no; I am certain of it; and I don't see that they take such care of you that you should be particular about asking their permission or advice. And as for the Wygrams, they would say the same thing; for they are very fond of you, and they are jealous, and would be angry at any one taking you away from them. But never mind that. When it was all over I should soon be able to pacify them. Now will you promise me so much—that you will form your judgment entirely by yourself?'

She was understood to assent; he could hardly hear her speak.

'And that you will make it "Yes" if you can?' he pleaded. 'Sabina, that is not too much to ask?'

Whether it was or not was of little consequence, for at this moment Mrs. Tremenheere made her appearance on deck; and the bishop, coming along, would insist on carrying Sabina away to have some tea or something of that kind.

Nor did Mr. Foster have another opportunity of speaking

privately with her during the rest of the way up the river; but as they were going ashore at Charing Cross—where Sabina was to embark in Mrs. Tremenheere's barouche, and be driven home that way—he managed to say to her, 'Will you send me a message to-morrow?'

And as they shook hands at the door of the carriage, she said to him—but with averted eyes—'Yes; to-morrow.'

It was not a long time in which to form a decision which would affect the whole of her life; and yet it cannot be said that she spent an agonising night of doubt and dread. For one thing, she was no timid young creature of seventeen, driven out of her wits by the discovery that Charlie has stolen unawares into her heart, confronted by the awfulness of having to break her promise to poor Tommy, and conscious at the same time of certain secret and pronounced flirtations with Frank, that had no doubt awakened certain hopes in his mind, and that it would be remarkably difficult to explain away. Nor was there any wild passion in the matter; Sabina was twenty-five; she had seen too much of the real trouble of the world to care about indulging in romantic imaginary woes; life had been serious with her. Perhaps, indeed, a trifle too serious? For it was a cheerful prospect, on the whole, that Fred Foster had opened out before her. She was to have his advice and aid in time of difficulty; she was to have his blithe companionship when they thought fit to snatch a holiday. There was a kind of happy-go-lucky self-reliance about him which was in itself assuring; he seemed very certain that the projected partnership would work well; she did not think it would be so much amiss if on occasion they left overcrowded lanes and alleys for a pleasant drive to Goodwood.

Nor had she any fear about forming a decision for herself; for she had for long been accustomed to manage her own affairs. And well she knew that he had spoken truth in warning her as to the consequences of her seeking counsel either from her own people or from the Wygrams. Neither the one nor the other knew Fred Foster as she did; they were governed by a violent prejudice against him; it would not be honest advice she would get, but an expression of

ill-will. And was it not a pity to see this young fellow, who had many good qualities about him, left to drift uselessly about the world? His income she knew was not very large; indeed, he was almost entirely dependent upon his mother; still it might be better employed than in backing horses. Her income and his together would enable them to live very comfortably in a moderate way, and also permit her to continue her works of charity as well as to have a little amusement now and again, according to his projected plan. His mother would be kind to her, she knew. Altogether, regarding the matter from every possible point of view, it not only looked reasonable and practicable, but also attractive in many ways; as for Fred Foster himself, surely it was affection that had prompted his offer (for she had no fortune); then she liked his frankness, and his sardonic self-criticism, and also the quiet audacity with which he sought to get the best of everything within his reach; and she made no doubt that a man like this, who was rather given to belittling himself, would in the end turn out more trustworthy than a man who was eager to show himself off to the best advantage.

And yet it is no light matter for a young woman to sign away the days of her freedom and maidenhood; and next morning the letter that was to deliver Sabina into slavery—into partnership, he called it—was written many times over before she could consider it even passable. And when she came downstairs to breakfast, she was somewhat self-conscious, and rather avoided Janie's eye.

'Are you tired, Sabie, dear, after your trip to Greenhithe?' said Mrs. Wygram, noticing that she was rather silent.

'No, no, not at all;' the girl said, and some slight colour came unwittingly into the pale, calm, beautiful face. 'Why, it was a holiday—I think we all enjoyed it very much.'

By and by Sabina had to set forth on the business of the day; and this time she was going alone. But before leaving the house, she sought out Janie, and took her into the drawing-room, where there was no one but themselves. She had her hand on Janie's arm.

'Janie, dear, I have a secret to tell you.'

Her eyes were smiling; her cheeks rose-tinted; she was hesitating and timid—and then she suddenly made a step forward and kissed Janie, and put her head close to her head.

'Janie, be kind to me—don't be vexed—I—I am engaged to be married.'

Janie withdrew herself from that embrace, her surprise was so great.

'You, Sabie?' she managed to say. 'But—but—to whom?'

'To Mr. Foster,' was the answer given in a kind of doubtful tone.

'Oh, Sabie, what have you done!' the girl cried, and there was anguish in the cry, and her face had grown suddenly pale. 'Oh, what have you done, Sabie—when—when there was one man in all the world who really loved you——'

Janie had stepped back, white-faced and frightened.

'Yes, and you knew it—you knew it—and now you have broken his heart!'

'You must not talk such nonsense,' said Sabina, somewhat proudly. 'And we will not mention the subject again until you have come back to your senses.'

And therewith she turned and went from the room, leaving poor Janie entirely overcome; for not only was she aware that an awful calamity had occurred—and to her beloved Sabie—but also she had quarrelled with her nearest and dearest friend.

CHAPTER XVII

PREPARATIONS

In these days of strict governance one would hardly expect to find in Kensington High Street a well-conducted young lady vainly endeavouring to repress her sobs, and occasionally and furtively wiping a tear-drop away from her wet eyelashes. Yet such was Janie Wygram's condition on this July morning; and she had not quite recovered her self-control even when she had got up to Notting Hill. But she had grown reckless in this sudden grief that had come upon her; and she longed for consolation—which is sometimes to be found in the imparting of news to a faithful friend; and it was with no hesitation at all that she rang the bell of Walter Lindsay's house, and asked if he was at home.

He was at home. He was in the studio, she was informed. Was he alone? Only a model with him. But Janie had lived much among painters; she knew that models form the telephonic system of the art world; and this communication she had to make to Walter Lindsay was not meant for alien ears. So she sent a message to him, and awaited him in the drawing-room.

Presently she heard a step, and her heart sank within her. She knew not how to meet him. And even as he came forward to greet her—a little surprised he was, but certainly pleased by this unexpected visit—she could not help thinking, with a heavy heart, that it was this man, so distinguished-looking, so generous of nature, so courteous and gentle in all ways, that Sabina had thrown over—for whom? She stole another glance at him, and essayed to

speak, but in vain. Then he noticed that she had been crying, and instantly he took her hand again, and his face was full of a quick concern.

'What is it? What has happened?' he said.

'I—I came to tell you,' said Janie, striving not to give way. 'Sabie—Sabie is engaged to be married.'

Quite involuntarily he dropped her hand. She did not dare to look at his face. Indeed, her eyes were all wet and blind; she had enough to do with her own trouble.

As for him—— They say that a drowning man sees all the backward years at a glance. He seemed to see all his future years—stretching on and on—gray, barren, hopeless, solitary. That was but for a moment.

'I suppose—it is—to that Mr. Foster?' he said, in a voice that was apparently quite calm.

'Oh yes,' said Janie, in a half-hysterical fashion. 'And I have been afraid of it all along! They were together always at Brighton—I heard it from mother—and Sabie is so strange—she lets herself be talked over—especially if you ask anything from her—and I suppose that—that contemptible horse-jockey has appealed to her sympathy, and she has taken pity on him.'

'Janie,' Walter Lindsay said gravely, 'don't you think it would be wiser if you tried to make the best of what has happened?'

'But it was you I wanted her to marry, if ever she married any one,' Janie broke out afresh. 'We all wanted it. If Sabie had only done that——'

'But what is the use of speaking of it?' he gently remonstrated—and she was so much occupied with her own sorrow that she did not notice how gray his face had become all this while, how haunted and absent his eyes. 'You know that was never possible.'

'No, I suppose it was not,' she said, in a kind of despair. 'I suppose it was never possible. You were too well off; too happy; and—and—and every one making much of you. She used always to talk of you as being so fortunate, having such a great career before you. It was always work she thought of; she never let sentiment, affection, come in—unless it was about poor people.

Yes,' added Janie bitterly, 'you were always too well off for Sabie. But if you had been a miserable, insignificant, conceited, contemptible creature, like this horse-jockey——'

'Janie,' he said, with a touch of authority, 'you are acting very foolishly. You are letting your disappointment become a craze; and it will be all the more difficult for you to remain on good terms with Mr. Foster if you nurse this silly anger against him.'

'On good terms with him?' she said scornfully.

'For Sabina's—for Miss Zembra's sake.'

'But Sabie has gone away from me now!' Janie cried. 'Sabie, who was my friend——'

'She is your friend,' he said quietly. 'Now, sit down and tell me how all this came about, and how you heard of it.'

Janie sat down obediently; but how was she to tell him of the arguments and persuasions that Fred Foster had used in winning over Sabina? Janie knew nothing of all these; but she had formed her own theories and guesses, and it was these that she now placed before him, Walter Lindsay in vain endeavouring to mitigate the malice of her insinuations. And as for Foster's motives in seeking to make Sabina his wife, she could make them out also. Sabina was a very pretty woman; and, for a year or two, until he got tired of her, she would do him credit when he drove her to a racecourse. Then there was her £300 a year. Sabina, Janie explained, was very frank in discussing her financial position when charitable projects were being considered; of course Mr. Foster must have learned what her allowance from her father was. And would not the £300 be a handy addition to his income, and enable him to bet à little more on horses and greyhounds? Besides that (Janie contended) he was of course expecting a rich man like Sir Anthony Zembra to give his daughter a handsome marriage-portion. Where would that go? In gambling, of course. And then? Poor Sabie!

'No, no, no!' he said, 'I will not hear anything of the kind. These are only Cassandra prophecies. Depend

upon it, a woman like Miss Zembra could not make such a mistake in her choice; there must be something finer and better than that in him; remember she knows so much more about him than you do. And you are going to be reconciled to him—that is what you have got to do; and both you and I, whatever happens, will remain Miss Zembra's fast friends; and I, for one, I—I wish her a very happy marriage!'

She raised her eyes to his face. There was not much gaiety there, but a serious wistfulness, rather; and his look, which was directed to the window, was thoughtful and absent. And for the life of her—regarding him thus—she could not help repeating what she had said before as to what she had sketched out as Sabina's future.

'No, I think none of us were anxious that Sabie should marry; she was so good and perfect and beautiful that we all wished to have a share in her and to have a little of her kindness and attention; but if she was to marry, it should have been you; indeed, indeed, that would have reconciled us all to it.'

'But it is of no use talking of that now,' said he, gently putting away the subject. 'No, dear Miss Janie, what you have to do now is to think of what is best for her. As for me, I don't pity myself overmuch. Surely no harm can come to any one through having known a good woman. Anything more than her friendship was never possible; but I had that for a time, and I will remember it all my life, I hope. Now, give me your promise.'

'What?'

'That you will do everything you can for Miss Zembra, and, as the first thing, that you will receive her future husband as she would like to have him received.'

'No, I can't promise that,' she said stubbornly.

'And what is the value, then, of your affection for your Sabie, as you call her?'

'You ask too much—you ask too much!' she exclaimed; and the tears were like to come into her eyes again; but she rose, as if to go away. And then she said reluctantly, 'Well, I—I know what you say is right. It isn't everybody who is so unselfish as you. Perhaps, some time later

on, I will try; and I hope that what you say will come true, and that there is a chance of Sabie's being happy. But I should have been happier if she had made another choice.'

'Remember,' he said to her at the door; and as she turned to him for a moment, she thought there was something in the grave, sad face she had never seen there before, an inexpressible gentleness and tenderness, as it were—'remember,' he said, as his last word to her, 'that you are Miss Zembra's friend, and may be of great help to her. There are some who would be proud to be in that position.'

Well, if Sabina, at this crisis of her life, was to have the goodwill and aid and sympathy of her friends, it was more than she was likely to receive from her relatives. Of course, she said to Fred Foster, she must go and tell her father of her engagement.

'As for that,' remarked Mr. Foster, in his cheerful manner, 'if there's going to be any kind of a row, you'd better let me do it. Oh, I don't mind. I have an impression that your father isn't very fond of me; and if he wants to say so, or to say anything nasty about our engagement, I am willing to stand the racket. Bless you, it's wonderful how little words can hurt you, if you look at them the right way. They're only air—air can't hurt you. I've seen a woman's lips turn white because of a little remark addressed to her. It would need some particularly penetrating patent gastight remarks to make my lips turn white. Oh, I shouldn't mind in the least.'

'I hope there won't be any trouble,' Sabina said. 'They've always left me to act for myself. But if there should be any objection—or—or misapprehension—I am sure that I shall be able to talk more gently than you would.'

'Oh, I don't believe in gentle speaking,' said he cheerfully. 'Plain speaking is ever so much better. Besides, there may be a few little business arrangements to talk over; you'd better let me go.'

Sabina laughed.

'Are we to have a quarrel already?' she asked. 'It

is true I have been living separate from my family for some time; and they let me go my own way; but don't you think it would look a little bit queer if I were to send a third person to tell my father that his daughter was going to be married?'

'Do as you like then, Sabie,' said he in his offhand way. 'But I think I should have made a better job of it.'

That same afternoon Sabina went along to the Waldegrave Club. It was with her father alone, she considered, not with the other members of the family, that she had to deal; and she knew when she would most likely find him at his club—a little before question-time at the House. The hall-porter at the Waldegrave recognised her at once, for she had often called there. He asked her to step within and take a seat, while he sent a page-boy for Sir Anthony; and so it was that Sabina found herself awaiting her father in this great hall, that looked so quiet and clean and cool after the din and dust of the hot London streets.

Sir Anthony came along in his most majestic manner, serene, complacent, looking all round the hall for some one to favour with a distant nod. When he reached Sabina, he plumped himself down beside her on the softly-cushioned seat.

'Well, Smallpox,' he said (for he was a desperately witty person on occasion), 'what do you want now?'

'Do you remember Mr. Foster, papa?'

'Foster,' he said, with a sudden coldness. 'Do you mean the young man who was good enough to confer his society on us for a considerable period—a very considerable period?'

'But it was through no fault or wish of his own, papa,' she pleaded. 'Why do you speak of him like that? It is such a pity you should have formed a prejudice against him.'

'We're rid of him now, anyway; and I wish to hear no more about him,' he said shortly.

'But it is about him I came to see you,' she said.

'Oh. He is in the hospital still, I suppose; and you want to raise a subscription for him when he comes out. Is that it? Well, you needn't come to me—I will not give you a shilling—no, nor a penny.'

'Papa, he is a gentleman!' she said rather incoherently. 'And please don't talk of him like that. I—I am engaged to be married to him.'

He stared at her in dumb surprise. Was the girl mad? And then, when he had become convinced of the truth of the few words she had just spoken, he broke into no violent explosion (how could he, in the hall of the Waldegrave Club?), rather he affected to treat the news with much respect.

'Really, Sabina, I am very much obliged to you,' he said (though the look in his eyes was scarcely in consonance with the extreme suavity of his voice). 'Your consideration for us all is most kind. You can't imagine what a relief will be felt at home. For, of course, knowing your ways, we had been expecting you to choose at the highest a costermonger for your husband; and we had been looking forward to a visit from you all—the charwoman, his mother; his brother, the prize-fighter; and his sister—well, anything; and we should have had altogether a nice family party. But this is a much better arrangement—quite a bound up the social ladder—let's see, what is his profession?'

'Papa, you are not very kind to me,' she said, with a slight quiver of the lips.

But at this moment Sir Anthony Zembra's face became all beams and smiles. A very distinguished and famous statesman had just come out of the reading-room, and as he passed he nodded and said, 'How are you, Sir Anthony?'

And Sir Anthony, with the most winning expression, made haste to answer, 'How do you do! How do you do!' for who knows when one may wish to have the favour of a dispenser of office?

However, at the same moment, the remarkably keen eyes of the great man had caught sight of Sabina, and he stopped; for he was known to be very partial to pretty young ladies, whom he treated with an old-world courtesy that was very pleasant to look upon.

'Miss Zembra, I think?'

Sabina rose, as in duty bound.

'We don't meet very often,' said the old gentleman,

and he bowed over the hand that Sabina timidly extended to him, 'but I hear of you from time to time through Mrs. Tremenheere. Yes, I hear of your goodness. But mind you take care of yourself, my dear; we can't afford to lose any such as you.'

He patted her hand and said, 'Good-bye,' and went on his way. Sabina sat down again. Sir Anthony's face instantly resumed its former expression of perfectly implacable coldness and firmness.

'Well, now that you have given me the information, what more?' he said.

'Have you nothing to say to me, papa?' she answered, with an appealing look.

'Oh, I wish you joy, if that is what you mean,' he said calmly. 'I wish you joy—without any sarcasm. Marrying a man you don't know——'

'But I do know him—everything about him,' she said. 'And I know his people—and his mother has promised to be very kind to me.'

'More than my own relatives seem likely to be!' she might have added; but she did not want to make mischief.

'Oh, his mother has promised to be very kind to you. Has she offered to support you?'

'I hardly know what you mean,' she said, rather bewildered.

'Only that I don't see that I am called upon to support another man's wife,' he continued. 'You take this step without the slightest consultation with your family. You did not consult them probably because you knew it would be against their wishes. Very well. It's a free country. You may go your own way; but as you make your bed you must lie on it. You don't suppose that I am going to support you and this man who has no claim upon me whatever, unless unbounded impudence be a claim.'

'My husband will be able to support me,' said Sabina proudly, but imprudently, for his eyes darkened a little.

'Very well,' he said, in the same impassive way. 'We'll see how it turns out. But mind, I never do anything out

of anger. I will make you a certain allowance, so that you shall not have to fear starvation. I think that is my duty. What the amount will be I will consider later on.'

'Papa, I did not come here to ask you for money!'

'No? Then I suppose you came merely to impart the agreeable news. Well, having done so, is there anything more to be said? I must be off to the House.'

She knew not what to say. She had expected that he would be annoyed, and that she might have some trouble in talking him over. She had not expected to be confronted with this stony and stolid indifference.

'Won't you come to the wedding?' she said, in desperation.

He lifted his eyebrows in affected surprise.

'Come to the wedding? No, I think not. What could put that into your head? Of course you are quite aware that if you are really bent on this folly—if you are determined to throw yourself away on this man—then I must decline to have either him or you come near my house. I don't wish to make any fuss. You are a grown woman; you are able to judge for yourself. I only wish to let you know clearly what will be the consequences of this freak of yours.'

She rose; her lips were proud and firm.

'Yes, I understand,' she said; and she bade good-bye to him without offering her hand; and turned and went away; and got into the cab that was awaiting her; and drove home.

And how eagerly and impatiently she waited for Fred Foster, who was to come to see her that evening!

'Oh, Fred,' she said piteously (Janie had retired from the drawing-room), 'it was dreadful!'

'I knew it would be,' he said laughing. 'All the fat in the fire, no doubt. You'd much better have let me manage the business.'

'I suppose a girl should never say anything against her father,' poor Sabie continued (rather clinging to him a little, as if for sympathy); 'but he was like stone—if it had been mere anger, I shouldn't have minded so much.'

'It will blow over,' he said carelessly. 'They're often like that, those inconvenient papas. But they always come round in the end, especially if there's——'

'If there's a baby,' he was on the point of saying, but luckily stopped in time.

'And about the money—he seemed to think I had come to ask him for money!' she continued.

'Yes, I told you you'd better have left me to manage it,' he answered coolly. 'But it's all right, Sabie; it will be all right in the end, never you fear.'

'But will you do this for me?' she said, at once timidly and eagerly. 'You know, my father said he would make me an allowance—but you can't tell how it was offered: well, now, if I could only say to him, "No, thank you, my husband can support me," don't you see how proud I should be? I don't want to do it out of anger or revenge—but to justify you, and to show him that the cruel things he said were quite uncalled for. Do you think we could afford to refuse that allowance? I know it would make a great difference to me—I mean it would be so much more difficult to look after any of those poor people; but we might pinch a little—I could, in lots of things; I would try hard.'

'My dear child,' he said good-naturedly, 'you're suffering from a fit of heroics. Your sensitive soul has been wounded. No doubt you and I could live on my income, with prudence and a frugal and contented mind; but most assuredly you would have no margin for your tribe of dependents. No, no, Sabie, don't be angry with your poor father; he'll come round. He did not mean the half of what he said—they never do; but it sounds well, and gives them importance for the moment.'

'It was for your sake,' she said, hesitatingly.

'But, you see, I haven't a sensitive soul. We couldn't afford to run two in the same establishment. I care as little what the good papa thinks of me as he does of what I think of him. No, no; the wise thing to do is to take what we can get, and to hope for more; and I daresay we shall do very well, somehow or other. And don't be too down-hearted about the Herr Papa—I tell you

it's wonderful how much more people say than they mean.'

There was a tapping at the door; a maid-servant announced to them that the rest of the household were awaiting them at supper; and Sabina's proud project of renunciation was at an end.

CHAPTER XVIII

A WEDDING

It was a summer night at Brighton. The tall house-fronts were gray and wan against the crimson and yellow still lingering in the north-western heavens; but far away over the sea, to the south-east, there dwelt a golden moon in a sky of pale rose-purple; and the moonlight that fell on the wide waters was soft and shimmering, until it gleamed sharp and vivid where the ripples broke on the beach. Here and there the stars of the gaslamps began to tell in the twilight. There was a faint murmur of talking; young girls in white summer costumes went by, with laughter and jest; there was an open window, and somebody within a brilliantly-lit drawing-room was singing—in a voice not very loud, but still audible to such of the passers-by as happened to pause and listen—an old Silesian air. It was about a lover, and a broken ring, and the sound of a mill-wheel.

Walter Lindsay was among these casual listeners—for a minute or two; and then he went on, with some curious fancies in his head. Not that any young maiden had deceived him, or that he was particularly anxious to find rest in the grave; for this is the latter half of the nineteenth century, and he, as well as others, knew that Wertherism was now considered ridiculous. But somehow London had become intolerable to him; and he could not work; and—well, Brighton was the nearest place to get away to, while one was considering further plans. It was a little lonely, it is true; especially on these summer evenings, when all the world seemed, as it were, to be murmuring in happiness. Over there was the Chain Pier. A few golden points—gas

lamps—glimmered on it; and beyond it there was a small boat, the sail of which caught the last dusky-red light from the sunset, and looked ghostly on the darkening plain. In that direction peace seemed to lie. He began to think that if he passed away from this laughing and murmuring crowd, and went out to the end of the pier, and quietly slipped down into the placid waters, the world would be none the worse for the want of him, and a good deal of heart-sickness would come to an end. He did not really contemplate suicide; it was a mere fancy. Killing oneself for love is not known nowadays, except among clerks and shop-lads; and then it is generally prefaced by cutting a young woman's throat, which is unpleasant. No, it was a mere fancy that haunted him, and not in a too mournful fashion. He thought of the people who would decide that it was at such and such a moment that he must have flung himself into the sea, from the fact of his watch having stopped then; and he knew that they would be in error, because, of course, the water does not instantly get into the inside of a watch. He even remembered the story of the impecunious reporter who wrote, 'Sevenpence-halfpenny having been found in the pockets of the deceased, no motive could be assigned for the rash act;' and he wondered whether, he having several sovereigns in his pocket, it would be assumed that this was not suicide at all. But these were but idle dreams and reveries; because he knew that this dull, continuous, insatiable heartache in time would cease—or, at least, he hoped so; and, besides that, he thought he would like in the coming years to be kind to Sabina's children.

There were so many young women coming along this Marine Parade; some sedately walking with their mammas; some giggling with their companions; some aimlessly alone and silent: why was it that none of them had any interest for him at all, and that his heart was far away in London? In the distance, sometimes, he saw a tall figure; and a sharp spasm of wonder would seize him: might not this be some one like Sabina—with something of the inexpressible magic and charm of Sabina's presence, with something of Sabina's look in her eyes, with the proud set of her head and her fearless gait? Then the young lady would draw

near—perhaps graceful and good-looking and gentle-looking enough, and no doubt a most charming and accomplished and praiseworthy young person; but the first swift glance that told him it was not Sabina herself was sufficient; she went by unheeded. Of course all this was the sheer perversity of foolish sentiment; and he knew it; and he walked back to the Bedford Hotel declaring to himself that love was the most idiotic thing in the world (and rightly laughed at by all sensible people), and that what he was really concerned about was the size of the canvas on which he was to attempt a picture of the Shannon rapids at Killaloe.

On reaching the hotel he found awaiting him there a letter from his faithful friend and correspondent, Janie Wygram, who had promised to let him know how things were going on.

'DEAR MR. LINDSAY,' she wrote, 'I have tried to do as you said; and it has not been quite so hard as I expected; for I do think he is really fond of Sabie—in a careless way; and that he is good-natured when everything is done to please him. But sometimes—well, you will say I am prejudiced, but I must tell the truth—sometimes he vexes me terribly. Why, he seems to think it is all a piece of fun, a frolic! Fancy any one marrying our Sabie as if it was part of a Bank Holiday excursion! He doesn't in the least understand what a prize he has won, or the favour she has shown him; it's all a free-and-easy give-and-take with him; indeed, I am not sure that he doesn't consider that she is the one who ought to be smiling and grateful. I know he has a pretty good opinion of himself, anyway; and you understand how generous Sabie is; she always makes the most of everybody; and of course, after what you said, I'm not going to make her discontented or pick out defects. But fancy having to write like this about Sabie's lover! I don't think I ever did really want her to marry anybody; but many a time, in reading poetry, I have thought that if ever Sabie had a sweetheart, it would be a beautiful sight to see, and just like the wonderful pictures of the poets. Many a time I have thought of her as Rosalind, putting the

chain round Orlando's neck, and wishing him well in the wrestling; for giving is Sabie's natural attitude, I think. But it is no use talking; and I won't say how very, very different from these romantic pictures is the present situation; for you are quite right about making the best of it for her sake; and you may be sure of this, that however *any one else* may choose to behave, or make light of his great good fortune, which he *doesn't understand a bit*, Sabie remains herself as distinguished and refined and gentle and beautiful as ever, and just goodness itself. Mother says I am mad about her. I wonder what *she* is? However, if I am, I don't care who knows it; I am proud of it; and if people only knew Sabie as intimately as I do, they wouldn't be much surprised, I think.'

He laid down the letter for a moment. He saw clearly the situation she described, despite the cunning with which she affected to be saying smooth things. And was this the predicament in which Sabina had placed herself? He could not believe it. Janie Wygram was only half-concealing the violence of her prejudice. She took Fred Foster's cheerfulness—in itself an admirable quality—for indifference. Perhaps she was disappointed that these two betrothed people did not show her a little more of the romance of an engagement; *he* was not disappointed that Sabina should refuse to bill and coo for the edification of bystanders.

'I hope there will be no trouble in the future,' the letter went on, 'but I want you to understand that Sabie's father has behaved like a monster. They may say what they like about him in the papers; but certain I am that he has not the heart of a human being. He came here the day before yesterday (the first time he has honoured our house with his presence since Sabie came to live with us) and made a settlement of everything. That is to say, he never asked Sabie if she was still of the same mind; there was no quarrelling, or even remonstrance on his part—for he is far too selfish and cold and hard a man to take so much trouble about anybody; and then he told her what he meant to do. She is to have £100 for her wedding outfit; and afterwards he will allow her £150 a year to keep her from

starvation, as he says; but he won't allow either her or her husband ever to come near his house. Sabie did not break down at all; she is too proud; indeed, the cruel thing is that Mr. Foster would not allow her to refuse the allowance altogether, which she wanted to do. Of course he took it in his chirrupy way. He says it will be all right; and that after the marriage her father will relent. But she says he will do nothing of the kind; and she knows him better than Mr. Foster does. Fancy such meanness—to his eldest daughter; and that they should be for ever praising him in the papers for his public spirit and his benevolence! But what he gives to Sabie isn't printed in a list of subscriptions; I suppose that is it.

'There is one good thing; my dear one will have a true friend in Mr. Foster's mother. The old people came to town the other day; and Mrs. Foster was very, *very* nice and affectionate. Matters don't go smoothly between father and son, I imagine; but of course I wasn't allowed to hear too much; and perhaps now that he is to marry and settle down there will be greater harmony. Sabie will be the peacemaker; surely if they can withstand the sweetness of her disposition, they are made of sterner stuff than some people I know. I do wish she had some other kind of a father than that cruel old beast, Sir Anthony; just fancy the thousands and thousands he has; and he must needs cut down the girl's allowance by £150 just because he dislikes the man she is going to marry. Why, he might be proud to know that he has such a daughter; but there is none of *his* nature in Sabie; she must have got all her goodness and honour and generousness from her mother. If I were a writer in the papers, wouldn't I give it him! I'd show the public what a monster of meanness and hypocrisy he is; why, I believe he is glad that Sabie is going to marry against his wishes, for it will save him £150 a year.

'Dear Mr. Lindsay, tell me if I bother you writing to you about Sabie. I can't talk to her as I used to. He has come between us; and she has other interests; and although she is as kind as ever, still this other future that is now coming near must engage all her attention. If only her heart had been placed elsewhere I should not have repined;

no, I should have rejoiced; and I should have borne without a murmur a good deal of coldness or indifference on her part, if I saw that her affections were wholly centred on one worthy of them. Never mind; Sabie will always be dear Sabie to me, whoever claims her; and if there should be a time of trouble she won't want for one friend at least.

'The marriage is to be soon (because the chirrupy man thinks it's all a kind of gay pastime, I suppose), and I am to be the only bridesmaid. After that is over Sabie will have just as much of my friendship as she asks for; I am not going to intrude. Please forgive me for sending you so long a letter; I thought you might like to know how matters stand. And I hope everything will turn out well; but sometimes I am a little miserable—perhaps needlessly.—Yours sincerely, JANIE WYGRAM.

'*P.S.*—Would you mind sending Sabie a little message of congratulation; or is that asking too much?'

A message of congratulation! yes, and more. He put on his hat again and went out. The summer night was cool; it was pleasant to pass along through the light-hearted murmuring crowd. By this time the skies had darkened into a clear rich violet; the moon was shining with its fullest radiance; the sea broke in sharp ripples of gold along the shingle; the shadows of the people were black on the wan-gray pavements. What was he to do for Sabina? That, at least, was something more comforting to think of than the vague heart-sickness of renunciation.

And very wild some of these first projects were. He thought of settling his little patrimony in Gallowayshire on her, for her sole and exclusive use; of selling his studio and all its appurtenances, and then of 'taking the world for his pillow,' as the Gaelic stories say when the hero sets forth on his adventures. For he wished to get away from England somehow. And in thinking that he would be more content if the wide Atlantic were the barrier between him and Kensington High Street and Kensington Square, he was facing no foolish risk. His work was well known in art circles in America; several American artists were among

his familiar friends; he was already a member of the Tile and Kinsman Clubs; the far Western land would in time come to be his home. And if he achieved fame there, might not Sabina occasionally hear of him? And if, after many years, he had amassed a little money, well, there was a vision before him of an elderly, white-haired man returning to his native country, and perhaps finding a young Sabina there—a Sabina in all ways like her mother, but with her face bright with youth and hope, and her chestnut-brown hair as yet unstreaked with gray—who might be his companion on an afternoon stroll or so, and introduce him to the young man she favoured, and accept a little dowry from her mother's friend of former days? These were far-reaching dreams; but at least they were not very selfish.

In the meantime that forsaking of his native land had to be postponed for the most singular of all reasons—Sabina's marriage Janie came to him one evening after he had returned to London, and diffidently and almost shamefacedly preferred her humble prayer. Sabie's relatives, she said, would have nothing to do with her; surely the few friends she had ought to stand by her. Lindsay looked at her for a second in his grave and thoughtful way.

'Do you think,' said he rather slowly,—'do you think Miss Zembra would like it?'

'Why don't you call her Sabie?' the girl cried piteously. 'Yes, yes, indeed she would! She asked me. Oh, I don't know whether she suspects there is any—any reason why you might refuse—how could I speak of that without saying too much——'

'And it is not to be spoken of any more,' said he gently. 'That is all past now. Yes, I will come to the wedding. I was thinking of going to America, but I will put that off. And in the meantime, Miss Janie, I wish you would help me to decide on a present for her. There are two or three things I have been thinking of. There is a dessert service in old Worcester that my mother was proud of. It's in Scotland.'

'Oh, Mr. Lindsay, you wouldn't give away an heirloom like that!' Janie cried.

'I know where there is a very handsome set of things for the dinner-table, in Venetian glass, that ought to do,' he said absently. 'But I will hunt about, and perhaps get something more unusual.'

It was a fair autumn morning that saw Sabina wedded. Janie was the only bridesmaid. When, after the ceremony, the beautiful, smiling, fair-haired bride came walking down the aisle on the arm of her husband there was a little murmur of approval among the old women and girls who had wandered into the church. The smile that was on her face was one of greeting; for she had caught sight of Walter Lindsay (whom she had not seen for a long while), and she paused for a second to give him her hand. He murmured something about 'happiness,' and they passed on.

'Good-bye, Mrs. Wygram,' he said at the church door.

'But you are coming home with us!' the old lady said.

'No, I think not,' he answered.

'Oh, but Sabie particularly wished you should. We were counting up last night how many friends she had who would take the trouble to come to the wedding—oh, indeed you must go back to the house. I thought Janie had arranged it with you!'

Well, he went, and found a very merry little party assembled in the familiar old faded drawing-room in Kensington Square. The happy bridegroom, very smartly dressed, and apparently quite recovered from his lingering lameness, was radiant, facetious, good-humoured to a degree; the bride (to use the faithful Janie's not very original phrase) looked more like an angel than ever. If she looked like an angel, she acted like a woman; for she singled out Walter Lindsay for the most especial and obvious kindness; and tore herself away from her sympathising feminine friends to talk to him, and to talk to him alone; and she was so anxious to know all about his future plans and projects.

'But you don't mean to remain in America?' she said, and her eyes were more frank and direct than his.

'Oh yes, I think so,' he answered.

'Why?' she asked in her straightforward way.

He hesitated for a moment, and then said with a

laugh, 'Don't you know that picture-buying is a lost art in this country? I want to see if there is a market for my wares on the other side. That will take a long time.'

'You will come back to your friends,' she said, quietly.

When at last the moment arrived for her going away, the usual little crowd followed her to the front door, and there was the customary throwing of rice and old slippers. Janie was standing on the steps alongside Walter Lindsay, and bravely endeavouring to restrain her tears. Just as the door of the brougham was snapped to, he heard her exclaim to herself, 'Sabie!'—and she put out her hand as if even now she would have entreated her friend to come back. It was a curious, involuntary little gesture; the stifled cry that accompanied it was almost a cry of anguish.

About a week after that Walter Lindsay sailed from Liverpool for New York.

CHAPTER XIX

A HONEYMOON VISIT

THE newly-wedded couple went down to Boscastle on the Cornish coast. Now Boscastle is a picturesque little place; but the occupations it affords are scanty; and in a very short time Mr. Fred Foster began to find the afternoon hanging rather heavily on his hands. Not that he was at all a dull companion. He had seen a good deal of life; was a shrewd judge of character; and could describe people in a semi-facetious vein that was at least meant to be amusing. Why, one whole morning—these two walking the while along the high Downs overlooking the western sea—he entertained her with an account of the various modes of concealing their emotion adopted by certain noble sportsmen while looking on at a race in which they were interested; how the Duke of Belvoir invariably found something wrong with the working of his field-glass; how Lord Cranesfoot seized the moment for selecting a big cigar, proceeding to chew the same without taking the trouble to light it; how Mr. De Gottheimer (no matter how pale his features might be) would affect to care nothing at all about the race, but rather to be surprised at the excitement of the roaring crowd around him; and so forth. Nevertheless, these walks along the Downs and along the country lanes and out by the little harbour to the hill facing the Atlantic, became a little monotonous; and Fred Foster was a frank-spoken person.

'Dame Durden,' said he, in his playful fashion, 'listen to me. I suppose it wouldn't be quite according to the correct card to ask a young lady on her wedding-trip to

visit her mother-in-law, would it? Beginning too soon, eh, to face the trials of life?'

'I will go with pleasure,' Sabina said promptly.

'You don't mean that?'

'I do.'

'Then we'll be off to-morrow morning.'

This resolve seemed to bring quite a new cheerfulness and liveliness into the atmosphere; and that evening at dinner he said, 'You know, Sabie, I wouldn't have made the suggestion if the Mater was like any one else; but she's just as good as gold; and she'll be awfully proud to see you. Indeed there are several reasons why it will be a very good move. We shall be there by the First; and I daresay I shall be able to pick up a few birds. But that's not the chief thing—the chief thing is this: that I want you to set seriously to work and make a poor thing of my pa.'

She looked up inquiringly.

'Oh, you can do it,' he said, with an air of sarcastic approval. 'You are a first-class performer, when you like, for all your innocent eyes——'

'But what do you mean?' she said.

'Well, I'm talking about the art of making a fool of people,' he answered blandly; 'and if there's any one can beat you at that, I've never met the person. Why, there's not a man nor a woman about this place, nor a boy nor a girl either, who isn't all smiles and simpers whenever you make your appearance; and the housekeeper brings flowers for the "dear, sweet young lady;" and the slavey washing the steps grins to you as if your going past her was a favour. Oh yes, you can do it. Why, you left those Wygrams in a perfectly gelatinous condition; I don't suppose Janie Wygram has done crying yet. Now I want you to try a little of that same business on my pa, and see what you can do with him. He's an uncommon rough subject, I can tell you; you'll have your work cut out for you; but if you can manage it, it will be a rare good thing for both of us. You'll have no trouble with the Mater. She's gone; she collapsed the minute she saw you. But if you make up your mind to go for the old man—and you

can when you like—there's no saying what he mayn't do for us. You see, picking ferns along these Cornish lanes is all very fine; and so is sitting on the top of a cliff and wondering how long it will be to lunch-time; but when we get back to London there will have to be some considering of ways and means. Of course it will be all right; you needn't be afraid; but in the meantime you might as well be civil to the old gentleman.'

'Oh yes, I'll be civil to him,' said Sabina laughing; she did not attribute too serious a motive to these wise counsels.

And doubtless it was chiefly as a joke that Fred Foster pretended to regard this trip into Buckinghamshire as the scheme of a couple of adventurers in sore need of money; and affected to advise Sabina as to how she should play her game. If the game was that of fascination, she had no need of his advice; it came naturally to her. From the moment that she set foot in the old-fashioned house just outside Missenden, the tall, pretty, refined-looking old lady who was mistress there became her daughter-in-law's bounden slave. She had come quickly to the door on hearing the wagonette drive up; the broad daylight—the open highway—she did not heed, though she was all trembling, and her eyes were filled with tears; the instant that Sabina alighted she was caught to this kind old lady's heart, and kissed again and again, without much regard for any passer-by. 'My dear!—my dear!' was all that was said; but she took Sabina's hand, and held it fast as she led her into the hall. She had scarce a word for her son. It was Sabina who was to be attended to; it was Sabina that she must herself take to her room; it was Sabina who was helped to remove her things, and pressed to have tea or wine or anything she could fancy; and all the while there was a good deal of petting and stroking of hands, with an occasional trickling tear or two.

'She's a goner,' said Fred Foster to himself (he was left with the luggage in the hall); 'but I'm not so sure about the old man.'

By and by, when the hubbub of the arrival had quieted down, the son of the house—who had been pretty much

neglected in the meanwhile—managed to get a few words in private with his wife.

'Look here, Sabie; I'm going along to see old Jakes—the keeper I've told you about, don't you remember?—and most likely I shan't be back till dinner-time. The Mater has her household affairs to look after—she goes through them like clockwork—you won't see much of her. But the old man is in the greenhouse—I saw him go in a minute ago—why don't you go and tackle him now? He's only snipping at his grapes; you've got a splendid chance. Off you go and do for him.'

She turned to him with a gravely innocent face; but there was some laughter in her eyes.

'I don't know what you mean. What am I to do?'

'Oh, of course, you don't know!' he retorted. 'You don't know how to do it at all! It wasn't you who knocked young Lionel out of his senses in about a couple of minutes in the Pavilion Gardens?'

She thought for a moment; and then she laughed.

'Oh, do you remember that? Mrs. Wygram was angry with me about that. I am sure I did not know I had done anything.'

'Oh, you can do it very well. Just you go and try a little of the same kind of thing on my respected papa; but mind, he isn't two and twenty.'

Well, whether from mischief or idleness or careless good-nature, Sabina, being thus left to herself, thought she could not do better than go and talk to the old gentleman—who had but spoken a few words of welcome to her and returned to his labours. Her reception in the greenhouse, when she timidly opened the door, was not of the most cordial kind.

'Where's Fred?' the old gentleman said sharply.

'He has gone to see the gamekeeper, I think—shall I—shall I be in your way, sir, if I stay here a little while?'

'Left you alone already, has he?' the old man grumbled, and seemed disinclined for further conversation.

But Sabina had had long experience in the humouring of people. She began to ask a few questions. Soon he was telling her all about his grapes, with a touch of pro-

fessional pride. She had praises for a country life. She was fond of a garden. What did he consider, now, gave him most satisfaction for all the care he expended—what were the flowers he was most interested in? The next thing that happened was that the old gentleman found himself walking about in the open with this pretty daughter-in-law of his, showing her all his treasures, chatting to her quite briskly and cheerfully, and apparently vastly pleased with both himself and her.

That was but the beginning. When dinner-time arrived Fred Foster got back rather late, and had barely a couple of minutes to rush upstairs and wash his hands and brush his hair. When he came down again, what was his astonishment to find old Mr. Foster arrayed in an antiquated suit of evening dress, with a stiff white neckcloth, and a waistcoat of black satin adorned with flowers in coloured silk. Such a thing had not happened within the son's recollection.

'Hallo, father,' said he, 'this is rather formal, isn't it?'

'You may treat your wife as you please; I hope I know how to show respect for my daughter-in-law,' was the chilling rejoinder.

'Well, that's rather rough on me,' the son said good-humouredly. 'I didn't bring any evening dress. Why, you have always set your face against it.'

All during dinner, too, the old gentleman would have a monopoly of Sabina's conversation; and resented any casual intrusion of his son as if he had no right to be there at all. As for the gentle-featured mother, she did not say much; she was content to sit and look at this new-found beautiful daughter, and to listen to her; and there were pride and a great affection very evident in the tender gray eyes. She had not been busy with her household matters all the afternoon; she had found time to ransack certain sacred repositories, and many were the bits of old-fashioned finery and lace and trinkets that she had resolved to bestow on Sabina. As she sat and looked at her she thought it would be very nice to put such or such a thing round Sabie's neck, and to fasten it in front with loving care. And there might be

a kiss in return?—for she thought the girl was rather affectionate.

Mr. Fred Foster took his snubbing very patiently; he spoke a word now and again to his mother; and was well satisfied to see Sabina (as he would have phrased it) rising so rapidly to first favourite. Grown happy with a few glasses of port, the old gentleman was gallantry itself. Many a rare old story, hidden for years in the dusky recesses of his memory, saw the light once more; he was facetious, patronising, sarcastic by turns; and generally he meant to convey to her that the young fellows of his day were a dashing set, adepts in all the arts of love and war. And then, when dinner was over, and John the butler (who was also groom, and helped in the garden besides) had put the decanters on the table, old Mr. Foster filled Sabina's glass and his own, and bowed to her graciously.

'No speech-making, my dear,' said he; 'but I hope you see that you are very welcome in this house.'

'Haven't you got a little bit of a blessing for me, too, father?' Mr. Fred ventured to interpose.

'For you?' said the old gentleman, after a moment's hesitation. 'Well, I will say this for you, that at last you have done a sensible thing—the first you ever did in your life, I think.'

But the climax came later. Old Mr. Foster had several odd ways and habits, to which he adhered with the rigour begotten of a methodical country life; and one of these was his invariable custom of going into the spacious stone-floored kitchen, the last thing at night, to smoke a pipe or two of tobacco in solitary communion with himself. Mrs. Foster could not bear the odour of tobacco in any of the rooms, not even in the greenhouse; the household went early to bed; the maids, before leaving, had everything trimly swept and tidied up; and there was a small wooden table placed in front of the smouldering fire, with decanters, a jar of tobacco, and two long churchwardens. The second churchwarden was supposed to be placed there for the service of Mr. Fred; but as a matter of fact that young gentleman did not find much gaiety in sitting and listening to grumblings over his own conduct and gloomy prophecies

as to the future of the agricultural interests of the country; so that the old man generally sat there alone, nor had he ever been known to ask any one to keep him company. Indeed, he was supposed to be busy. This was the time for the review of the day's doings, for plans for the morrow, and so forth. And this solitary retirement to the great and gaunt kitchen (which, nevertheless, was clean and warm enough) he had practised as a rite for over thirty years.

'My dear,' said he to Sabina, 'do you object to the smell of tobacco?'

'I like it,' was the plain answer.

'Yes, they all say that——'

'Oh, but I do—and it's very well I do, for sometimes I get a good dose of it.'

'Then you won't mind giving me a little of your company? My smoking-room is a plain one—the kitchen—there's always a fire, you see, and we don't annoy anybody. Where's your husband?'

'I think he has gone back to Jakes again, sir, to see about some dogs.'

'Come along, then, my dear,' said he, and when she promptly rose, he took her hand and placed it within his arm, and marched her away. 'It isn't a gilded smoking saloon, but it's snug. And I've such a story to tell you about an elopement. I had a hand in it myself, too, that I had, though it wasn't me the young lady was running away with. Faith, that was an act of friendship, wasn't it? To run away with a young lady on behalf of somebody else, and scarcely a man of the family less than a six-footer! But we did it, we did it, ay, and she got safe away, and over the border both of them were before the people chasing them had got to Carlisle. Come along, my dear, and sit down by the fire; it's a long story to tell. But there was some fun in those days.'

Fred Foster came in by and by.

'Where's Sabie?' he asked of his mother, who was quietly knitting in the little drawing-room.

'She has gone to sit with your father,' was the answer, and the old lady smiled a little.

'What! You don't mean in the kitchen?' he exclaimed, for such a thing had never been heard of before.

'Yes, indeed. He asked her, and she went at once.'

'Well, upon my soul! What's the matter with the old gentleman?'

Mrs. Foster looked up. 'It's very early in your married life to show jealousy, isn't it? But you'd better take care.' And then she added, 'Ah well, she is a dear. And this is what I think, Fred, that nothing luckier ever happened to you than your falling off that bicycle.'

If there was anybody jealous it was not Fred Foster. It was the old man who was determined to monopolise Sabina; and resented the slightest interference on the part of his son. The next morning, when Mr. Fred was buttoning on his gaiters in the hall, he called in to the breakfast room, 'Mother, we shall be shooting over Crookfield to-day; will you bring Sabie along for a while? Or will you send Tom to show her the road?'

But it was the old man who answered, and that sharply too. 'Nothing of the kind. What! Dawdling along muddy hedgerows or crossing wet turnip-fields!' Then the voice became less gruff. 'No, no, my dear, we've something better for you than that. Just to think that you've never seen Hampden House, and the splendid avenue of Spanish chestnuts, and the relics, and all. Why, I'll show you the very spot where they tried to levy the ship-money. Yes, yes, my dear, it's a beautiful country. I'll drive you myself; and then we'll go on to Wendover, and maybe pick up a bit of lace for you—local industries, you know—local industries must be encouraged.'

And so Mr. Fred went away with the keeper and the dogs; while Sabina by and by found herself seated next the old gentleman in front of the wagonette, and leisurely driving along a pleasant highway on this clear and fresh September morning. She was in excellent spirits, and ready to be pleased with everything she saw. She even took good-naturedly the grumblings and growlings that greeted the slightest reference to her husband.

'But you may be of his way of thinking too,' he said, and he sharply glanced at her.

'How, sir?'

'Oh well,' he said, softening a little, 'it might be more natural in you, yes, yes; I should not be surprised if you thought our life in this quiet place rather monotonous and dull. You are accustomed to the gay life of a big town—balls and parties.'

'Indeed, no,' Sabina said simply; 'that was never my way of living at all.'

'But look at him,' the old gentleman said angrily. 'Look at him—a Buckinghamshire lad—born and bred in this very valley—but nothing here is good enough for him; he must be off and away, living like a lord, and thinking of nothing but the different ways of spending money. There's Crookfield—the very place he is off to this morning. Mullein's lease falls in next Michaelmas. The old man's wife died last year; his sons are doing very well in Texas; he's going out to them; and so the farm falls on my hands. There's a fine old farmhouse—one of the prettiest places in the neighbourhood—where any young couple might make themselves comfortable and snug. But would my gentleman look at it? Oh no; spending money, not making it, is his trade; though goodness knows there's not much money coming nowadays to people who have farms to let—in this part of the world, at all events. There it is, you see—the farm coming on my hands—as fine a farm as any in the country standing empty—and him horse-racing, I suppose, and billiard-playing, and spending money.'

'But it is only natural for a young man to like amusement,' she said gently. 'And besides, sir, you should remember he has just turned over a new leaf. He is to be quite a reformed character when he goes back to London.'

'Why should he go back to London?'

She did not answer that question. But she understood clearly enough the drift of these remarks; and that same evening she said to her husband, 'I suppose you know, Fred, what the old people would like us to do. They would like us to settle down here—in the farmhouse at Crookfield—so as to be near them.'

'Yes, I know very well,' said he. 'It's exceedingly kind of them; but I'm not going to bury myself alive just yet.

And you—do you mean to tell me you could bear with another fortnight—well let's say a month—do you mean to tell me you could stand a month of the kind of life they live here?'

She looked at him in amazement.

'Why,' she said, 'I could live all my life this way, if I thought I had any right to do so. Could anything be more pleasant and peaceful and harmless—the garden, the driving, the seeing to the house?'

'It isn't wildly exciting,' he remarked.

'But you don't know how lazy I am naturally,' she answered. 'A fine day, a seat in the garden, and a book—what more could any one want? And I am sure kinder people never were born; oh yes, this kind of life would suit me very well. But I know I haven't earned the right to it. When we get back to London, and when you have a little time to come along with me, I will show you why I could not accept this quiet, pleasant life down here with anything like a good conscience. Perhaps some day——'

'Perhaps some day we will do Darby and Joan, you mean?' he said, lightly. 'I know one Darby—in these here parts—who seems a good deal fonder of his daughter-in-law than of his own lawful wife.'

'And how awfully fond she is of you, Fred!'

'Yes,' he said, 'the Mater has spoiled me all the way through. That's what has made me the wreck I am.'

'The wretch, you mean.'

'It's all the same,' he said carelessly.

In the meantime there was nothing to be done beyond the getting through these holidays as pleasantly as might be; and she submitted with a gracious indolence to the little plans that these good people drew out for her; and very kind indeed they were to her; and very proud of her they seemed. It was during this period, moreover, that she saw her husband at his best. If there was one strong feature in his character, it was his passionate devotion to his mother; and this, that she had only guessed at from his talking, she now saw put in evidence, in a hundred pretty ways, from morning till night. Just about as clearly as most people, Sabina perceived her husband's peculiarities

and defects; for she had a calm understanding, and she was not blinded by any wild romanticism. He was frivolous, careless, infirm of purpose; he was a little cynical and not a little selfish. But his affection for his mother, his admiration of her, his praises of her goodness, his faith in her counsels, his delight in her personal appearance—all these were beautiful things to look at or to listen to. If old Mr. Foster would have Sabina go with him for a stroll along the autumn-tinted highways, the son was well content to follow behind with the pretty and gentle mother, teasing her sometimes, at others petting her, but ever and always her champion.

'I suppose it is rather a stupid thing,' he said to Sabina, 'for a man to be proud of his own mother; but then, you see, they don't often make them like that.'

'She has been very kind to me,' Sabina said rather wistfully; she had not enjoyed much of a mother's care.

On the morning of their leaving for London Fred Foster addressed the following remarks to his wife, during the process of heaving his things into his portmanteau: 'Well now, Sabie, you've done everything I asked of you, and done it thoroughly too. I thought you would have had a tougher job with the old man, but you've settled him; you've made a poor, wretched, gelatinous thing of him; he's just as silly about you as the Wygrams used to be. But look here, my dear,' he said, regarding her rather ruefully, 'I haven't seen any practical outcome of it. Here we are going back, and not a word has been said about any little friendly assistance to two young people starting life together.'

'Oh, Fred,' she remonstrated, 'don't talk about money! They have been goodness itself to us.'

'Yes, my dear child, but money insists on being talked about; it is a way it has got. I don't say we haven't enough for present necessities; and those rooms in the Strand are not expensive, considering how handy they are; but still—one would have liked a trifling augmentation of income, so to speak; or even supposing that a little friendly cheque had been slipped into one's hand, I daresay one might have pocketed one's dignity. Or

perhaps he doesn't believe in my playing good boy down here? Wants to see how our small establishment is going to work? Payment by results, eh?'

'Fred, don't talk like that!' she implored. 'Surely we have enough, if we are careful and economical.'

'Oh, I assure you I am not frightened about the future,' he said gaily. 'The success of your performance down here has quite reassured me. When you can do for such a tough old character as my father, you won't have much difficulty in bringing your own father to reason, if once you set your mind to it. We shall be all right, never fear.'

Old Mrs. Foster was crying a little when she embraced her daughter-in-law for the last time at Wycombe station.

'Dear child,' she said, 'I—I suppose you are doing right in going away from us, but—but remember there is always a home waiting for you when you choose. God bless you, my dear. I shall look forward to your coming home. I know you will come and comfort the last years of an old woman's life.'

Sabina was not a sentimental person; but this old lady had been very, very kind to her.

'Good-bye, mother,' she said, with a half-stifled sob in her throat; and after they had got away from the station she sat very silent in a corner of the carriage, not caring to show that her downcast lashes were wet.

CHAPTER XX

IN LONDON AGAIN

THIS was Janie Wygram who was making her way up a dusky and narrow little staircase in a house in the Strand, and wondering the while what had induced the newly-married pair to pitch their dwelling in the very centre of the great city's turmoil. Then she gained a landing; there was an open door before her; and the next moment this was no other than her beloved Sabie who had eagerly caught her by both hands, and drawn her into the light, and kissed her, and was smiling and laughing with gladness to see her again.

'And I know what you're thinking, Janie—that we've gone stark, staring mad to come and live in such a place. Oh, but you have no idea how convenient it is. I can pop down to Hungerford Pier in a couple of minutes—the Charity Organisation Society is quite close by—there's Charing Cross Station handy for Fred—and Waterloo not so far away.'

At the first mention of Fred Foster's name the rather bewildered Janie involuntarily looked around; and Sabina instantly understood that mute interrogation.

'Fred's gone down to Lillie Bridge,' she said lightly.

As plainly as possible Janie's little glance of surprise said, 'He has left you already—alone in London, too?' but she was a prudent lass, and held her peace; and Sabina (whether or not she had noticed that look of surprise) continued cheerfully enough: 'I suppose he'll find some friends there, for he's not coming back till the evening; and so I thought I would use the day for my own

purposes. That is why I wrote to you, Janie dear. I want you to come and help me in getting a few things for the rooms. Comfortable little rooms, aren't they? And one need never be dull either: just look at this.'

She took her friend to the window; and showed her the busy, noisy thoroughfare, with its continual stream of passers-by; its shops and pavements and sandwich-men; its cabs and vans and omnibuses; its ceaseless movement and kaleidoscopic groupings.

'When I'm left a poor forlorn grass-widow,' Sabina said, 'I can always amuse myself here. But you know, Janie, I shan't have much time for moping. Come, shall we go and begin our purchases at once? I want to get a few pretty things, and some useful things as well, just to make the place trim and snug. Fred was no use in the way of advice; the only thing he could suggest was a cellaret.'

All this time Janie had been quite silent; but now she took Sabina's hand in hers, and regarded her with tender and earnest and wistful eyes, and said, 'Ah, you don't know, Sabie—how glad I am—to find you so—so—so happy—and contented.'

'Why, you dear, anxious, silly creature,' Sabina answered good-humouredly, 'what did you expect? Did you expect to find me sitting with a dagger and a bowl of poison before me? Come along now, and we'll get our shopping done; and then we'll come back here to have a bit of lunch; and you will tell me all about my friends down in Chelsea.'

And so they set forth; and soon they were both engrossed in that important business. At the same time Janie could not fail to perceive that Sabina seemed determined to be scrupulously economical, and betrayed a quite new desire to have money's worth for her money. Formerly she had been distinctly free-handed—even to carelessness; but now questions of small savings were considered; and more than once she contented herself with a second-rate article, in spite of Janie's protests. On their way back to the rooms in the Strand she even made some little kind of apology.

'You see, Janie, if I am to have any margin at all to help my poor people down there, we must be very prudent

in what we spend on ourselves. I daresay, in time, and with care, we may make a little nest-egg, just in case of emergency; but at present it is pretty much hand to mouth; and I know my father won't alter his resolution, whatever Fred may think. That hundred pounds my father gave me for the wedding outfit just made all the difference to us; you know I spent as little as ever I could; and out of the balance I paid for all these things we have been buying; and I lent Fred twenty pounds this morning; and even now I have another five and twenty left. So you see when I come again to visit my friends down there I shan't have a quite empty purse.'

'You lent Mr. Foster twenty pounds this morning?' Janie was startled into saying.

'Oh well,' Sabina rejoined, with her usual good-nature, 'he chose to call it a loan. I don't suppose our united fortunes will be so great that we need keep an account between us. I suppose that trip to Cornwall rather impoverished him—the driving is so expensive there; when you get married, my dear child, don't you go to Cornwall.'

'How very business-like you have grown, Sabie!' her friend exclaimed—perhaps with a touch of disappointment.

'A married woman, my dear, has her responsibilities,' Sabina answered briskly, as they were ascending to the room. 'And the first of these at present is to decide what we shall send out for, for lunch. Better still—we'll ring for the landlady, and ask her advice.'

It was quite like old times for these two to be having a frugal little meal together; and of course there was a great deal to be talked over concerning the fortunes and condition of the poor people who had been temporarily under Janie's charge. Nor were other friends forgotten; and at last Sabina said, 'And what about Walter Lindsay?'

Janie looked up quickly. 'Why, surely you know he has gone to America?'

'Oh yes, I remember his speaking about it,' Sabina said.

'His speaking about it,' Janie repeated, with something of reproach in her tone; and then she added, with a bit of a sigh, 'Ah well, Sabie, I suppose it was not your fault that you did not care for him.'

'But I did care for him,' Sabina answered warmly; 'I cared for him very much indeed. He and I were always the best of friends. I hardly ever knew any one I liked more—why, how could it be otherwise?—he was so generous and manly and courteous in every way. And so pleasant in manner,—I tell you, I liked him very, very much indeed.'

'He loved you, Sabie.'

Sabina hesitated for a moment, not knowing which way to take this.

'You should not say such things,' she said quietly.

'There's no harm in saying it now,' was the rejoinder.

'There would be harm if it were true,' Sabina said quickly. 'And I knew that you had some fancy of the kind, from the way you kept on talking about him. You mistook the very frankness of his friendship for something quite different.'

'Sabie, I'm telling the truth!' she cried. 'Why, he worshipped the very ground you trod on! There never was a man loved a woman more than he did you. He thought of nothing else but you; night and day he was contriving to do you some little kindness—or even to keep himself in your remembrance. Loved you?—yes, I should think he did; you will never meet with a love like that again, if you live for a hundred years.'

'Janie, you forget!'

'No, I don't forget,' Janie said piteously, 'but I want to speak just this once. I think it is cruel—he goes away, without a word—well, that is just like him; up to the last he had no thought or wish but for your happiness; and now—when you talk of other people—you—you mention him just as an ordinary acquaintance, and you've half forgotten that he's gone away to America! I suppose he would prefer that; it was always his way; whatever was best for you—that was all he thought of. I went to tell him when you got engaged. I suppose I was rather put about. I had expected other things. But would he say a single word—except of kindness for you? No; he made me promise to remain your friend whatever happened; he made me promise to make the best of everything; he had

nothing to say about himself, though I could guess well enough.'

'And so you think you are making the best of everything, Janie, by telling me all this?'

'I don't want him to be quite forgotten. I don't think it's fair. You would have remembered if the most ordinary acquaintance had gone away to America; and this man—the noblest man that I have ever met with—he goes away from his own country—and with a broken heart, as I take it—and you scarcely remember——'

'Janie, don't make me angry,' Sabina said. 'I tell you I remembered well enough his intention of going to America; we talked of it on my wedding-day; and he was as cheerful then as you might be now, if you had only a little common sense. Come, come, put that folly out of your head; and let me know if you have heard anything about him since his arrival—I should be glad to hear of him now and again; I suppose he has friends over there?'

'Friends? yes, I should think so!' said Janie proudly. 'You should have seen the account of the dinner they gave him at one of the artists' clubs in New York. Father got the newspaper, but I don't know who sent it; and they said such fine things about him, and spoke of his making America his home. But I know better than that,' Janie continued, with an air of authority—'I know better than that. He meant it one time, no doubt; and he meant to sell his house and studio; and he asked me to go up one afternoon and help him to pick out keepsakes for the people we knew before he sold everything off. Well, we were getting through with that—and we have all of us got something to remember him by—father and mother and all of us—when he came to the Chippendale cabinet in the corner of the studio. He did not think I saw him, but I did; he took out the cup of rock-crystal with the stones round it—you once drank out of that cup, Sabie——'

A slight flush came over Sabina's forehead.

'It was a piece of nonsense; I should have thought nothing of it only that your mother mentioned it afterwards.'

'Well, he looked at it a long time; and then he put it back; and then he turned to me. "Do you remember the

night Sabina came here to supper?" he said—for I had asked him to call you Sabina during these last few days, when we were talking a little about you. "Of course I do," I said. "Do you remember how pretty she looked when she was up at the corner of the table—the yellow *fichu* of lace round her neck, and the bunch of forget-me-nots in front? She was very kind to me that night. And do you remember her coming along through the garden, like a pale, beautiful ghost; and her surprise at finding the studio so well lit up? That is where she sat—on the sofa there—while they were singing 'Shepherds, have you seen my Flora pass this way?'—you remember all that evening, Miss Janie?" As if I were likely to forget it! "Well," he says, "it's no use. I meant to sell this place, and go to America for good. I'm going to America, that's all right; but so help me God, so long as I have a shilling left, I will never allow a stranger to come in and take possession of this house!" And that is how it stands at this moment; and yet—yet—you say that man was not in love with you!'

'Janie,' Sabina said, 'you talk to me as if you had something to reproach me with—as if I had done Walter Lindsay a great wrong. Well, you know Walter Lindsay. But so do I; and I think I know him well enough to make sure he never meant you to speak to me like that.'

This was a deadly home-thrust; and for a second poor Janie became rather pale, and bit her lip.

'You may say anything you like against me, Sabie; I am quite content when I see you begin to appreciate Walter Lindsay a little.'

That was all that was said on this subject just then, for lunch was over now; and when Sabina asked Janie what they ought to do that afternoon (Mr. Fred not returning till seven), and when Janie besought her to go down and see the old people in Kensington Square, she most cheerfully consented. They spent the afternoon partly in Kensington Square and partly in certain neighbourhoods to the south of that, looking up a few old friends and acquaintances; and then, when Sabina had to return to the Strand, Janie made the voyage with her from Chelsea Pier to Hungerford, but could not be induced to go farther than

that. Some other time, she said, she would call and see Mr. Foster and Sabina together.

As it chanced, if she had accompanied Sabina home to those rooms, she would have found Fred Foster in a remarkably good-humour.

'Ain't we smart!' said he, as he came in (Sabina had preceded him by but a few minutes). 'Now, I do call this uncommonly neat and snug for the very middle of London. Oh, Janie helped you, did she? Give her my love when you see her: she's not particularly beautiful, but I consider those people were awfully good to you. Now, Dame Durden, what's the programme for this evening?' To begin with, some dinner. The strong point of this arrangement is that we are not dependent on cooks or butlers or anybody who may get drunk and break things; you wander out into the world of London and dine where you please—the best of food and the best of wines, if you only know where to go; no bother. You can entertain your friends, too, when fortune smiles on you. So off you go and make yourself gorgeous, and we'll try the Cri.'

'The what?' she asked.

'The Criterion. No; let me see; we'll go to the Café Royal; there I may have a cigar after dinner. Look alive, for I'm desperately hungry.'

They went to that restaurant; and Mr. Fred showed considerable experience and skill in ordering their little banquet, with its appropriate wines. Sabina rather took him to task for his extravagance, but he said lightly: 'Oh, you let me alone. I've had a little bit of luck to-day. Well, I don't consider it luck, as I told you before—I consider it bare justice; it's only getting a little of my property back. Don't you make any mistake—the breast of a partridge and a glass of Pommard were specially invented by a beneficent Providence to go together—don't be a fool, but do as you're bid. I tell you I'm going to look after you, and see you through this turmoil they call life.'

He was quite merry, indeed, and told her many facetious stories about the two or three companions he had run against during the day. Indeed, so lightly did the time

pass, that it was after nine o'clock before he had finished his cigar and was ready to leave.

'I had intended taking you to the theatre,' he said, as he called for his bill, 'but that's the worst about play-going in London now; the theatres are too popular. You are never sure of a decent seat, unless you solemnly make up your mind a long time before—as if you were going to be married, or hanged, or something. Then they don't let you smoke. And besides, you've got to rush away in the middle of your dinner, just when one's inner consciousness feels the want of repose. Now, the music-halls don't give you the highest form of intellectual entertainment—I admit that. It isn't Shakspere. But, mind you, there's something uncommonly handy in your being able to drop in at any time; always something going on; a cigar or a drink when you want it, or an evening-paper to vary the thing. Look here, what do you say to driving up to the Oxford for an hour?'

'The Oxford?' she repeated inquiringly.

'Yes; it's a music-hall, don't you know? Oh well, it isn't high culture, as I admit; but it's a way of passing an hour; and then you wouldn't meet anybody—I mean, we should get a private box. No one would know that you were there, and sometimes there's very good singing.'

'If you don't mind,' she said, 'I think I would as soon go back to our rooms, and see how all our new finery looks.'

'Oh, very well,' he said contentedly; and so they went downstairs and got into a hansom and were driven home.

Sabina took to planning and arranging and stitching where that was wanted; he applied himself to Dufton's excellent treatise on 'Practical Billiards,' but soon fell asleep. When he awoke it was half-past eleven, and then he proceeded to mix for himself a little spirits and water as an adjunct to his final cigar.

CHAPTER XXI

SOME NEW ACQUAINTANCES

Now there had been a clear understanding, if no formal compact, between these two, that their life after marriage was to be in a manner a combination of their separate lives before it. He was to be at her right hand in all her various duties; she was to reward herself occasionally by a little participation in his amusements. He had talked her over into considering this a very sensible and practicable scheme; and on the one or two occasions when he was allowed to accompany her on her errands of mercy and help, his good-humour, his shrewd acquaintance with the world's ways, and his vivacious society, all came in very well. Unfortunately for this ideal co-partnership, however, when they returned to London it so happened that the Cesarewitch and Cambridgeshire handicaps had just been published, and he was much interested in the discussion of these imposts, and he was away a good deal among acquaintances whom he did not care to introduce to his wife, because their conversation was not in the least likely to interest her. Then came the Doncaster September Meeting. But when he had spoken of Sabina's giving herself a little holiday relaxation now and again, he had never thought of proposing to her a rough-and-tumble journey down to Yorkshire and back. He had thought of a sunny afternoon at Lord's, looking on at a cricket match; or a trip down the river in the steamer of the Royal Thames Yacht Club; or the Oaks, perhaps, or Ascot, or Goodwood—something pretty and lively and socially amusing; not this business-like meeting in the north. At the same time he considered it prudent, and

even kind, to break the news of his going in an artful and diplomatic manner.

'Dame Durden,' said he, 'you're a young and innocent thing; I wish you'd pray for the success of Squire Tipton.'

'That's a horse, I suppose?' she said, looking up from her books—for she now kept minute accounts of her expenditure.

'I should say so, and a very good horse too. He's in for the Yorkshire Handicap on Tuesday; and seeing that he ran second for last year's St. Leger, and that he is as fit as a fiddle, according to all accounts, I think he'll do the trick. That's Tuesday afternoon. I suppose I ought to go down Monday night; there's a train arriving about nine. Then the Leger is Wednesday——'

'But where is all this?' she asked innocently.

'Why, Doncaster.' And then he added, 'It wouldn't be worth your while, would it, to go all that way and back just for these few days?'

She hesitated; was it not for him to decide?

'Oh no, I'm sure it wouldn't!' he said instantly, interpreting her silence his own way. 'It isn't a ladies' meeting. I wouldn't advise you to go. A lot of fatigue; precious little amusement. You won't find the time hang heavily on your hands, will you, till I come back?'

'Indeed, no,' she said, with a smile. 'There's never a day long enough, it would seem.'

The truth was that she had now to gather up again all the threads of her charitable work that had been temporarily dropped; and his devotion to his own pursuits left her all the more time down there in Chelsea, in the company of the indefatigable Janie. Janie was not at all sorry that Mr. Foster did not put in an appearance. Why, it was quite like old times for her to find herself going about with her bosom friend; and there was always tea for them, when they wanted it, in Kensington Square; and Sabie, in Mrs. Wygram's eyes, was just as beautiful and gracious and bland and good-natured as ever, and quite as submissive to all the petting that could be bestowed on her. These good people did not seem to be altogether angry when they heard that Mr. Foster was going down to Doncaster, though of

course they made the remark that it was pretty early for him to be leaving his young wife.

But before Fred Foster went to Doncaster there were a few little matters to be considered. On the Friday evening, when Sabina returned home, she found him pacing up and down the little sitting-room in very evident disappointment.

'It's pretty hard,' he said. 'I suppose I must ask you to lend me a five-pound note——'

'But I will give it you' she said promptly, and she went to her desk with a light heart. 'I'm sure there is not much use in talking of lending or borrowing as between you and me—whatever I have is yours, and welcome.'

'If you're in such a generous mood,' he said, rather thanklessly, 'you might make the fiver a tenner, if you can.'

'Well, I can,' she answered, 'but it won't leave me very much.'

'It's very absurd, all this,' he continued, in his grumbling way, and he scarcely regarded her counting out the money on the table. 'Of course I thought the old man was going to do something—especially after the fuss he made about you. I consider it very shabby. I don't care for professions of interest and affection that don't mean anything. Why, it was enough to lead any one into being careless—or, at least, hopeful—the way they both treated you; and they must know very well that a wedding trip costs something; and I'm sure they couldn't expect me to have saved up a fortune out of my allowance.'

'But surely, Fred, so long as we can live comfortably enough, I would not make the relationship too much of a mercenary one?' she said gently. 'I am sure I never thought their kindness to me meant money. And look how well off we are as compared to many! It may be annoying to be in want of a few sovereigns now and again, but look at the comfort of knowing that our income, however small, is assured. There are the ten pounds; isn't it enough?'

'Yes it is—for the present: it is the whole situation that seems to me unbearable, and absurd also.'

'But if you have enough, what more would you have?' she asked—and she was inclined to laugh at this spoiled

child. 'You know, I shall be having my little cheque coming along on the 22d.'

'Yes, the twelfth part of £150,' he said bitterly. 'Accurately divided, to the shilling. No, no; I tell you, it won't do, Sabie. There must be some alteration. We ought to begin as we mean to go on; and it is easier for you to deal with your people than for me with mine; for your father is a very rich man, with whom the money itself can be no object; and I am perfectly certain he would do the right thing—what he ought in natural fairness to do—if he was approached the right way.'

She glanced towards him, and then she lowered her eyes.

'Do you mean that—that I should ask?'

'Yes, certainly,' he said bluntly. 'The very least he can do is to give you the allowance you had before you were married. Surely there is as much need for it now as then! That is the very least you ought to ask for.'

A faint colour overspread her forehead.

'You don't know,' she said, in a rather low voice, 'what his manner was towards me when that matter was settled—and—how he spoke of you.'

'Oh, that I understand perfectly well,' he said, impatiently. 'Why, it's the common story. Of course people say nasty things when they don't like a marriage; and goodness knows he's welcome to call me all the names he can think of. But that's neither here nor there. We can't afford to take a little display of temper for more than it is worth. It's only on the stage that parents curse their disobedient daughter, and drive her forth, and keep impossible vows about never seeing her again. Blood is thicker than water, depend on it. I have no doubt your father was annoyed; I daresay I should have been annoyed if I had been in his place; and, mind, you had been leading him on to be annoyed. I don't understand it at all; you can manage everybody else you come across—why did you quarrel with him?'

'There was no quarrel that I know of,' Sabina said, simply, 'but we had different ways of looking at things, that is all. When I left the house it was on a quite friendly understanding.'

'Oh well, he has simmered down by this time. And really something must be done. Will you write to him?'

'Fred,' she said, with a touch of entreaty in her voice, 'if you only knew the things he said——'

'My dear creature, if you paid heed to the things that are said about you, or thought about you, life would be intolerable! Let us get to something of more importance than that. And the immediate and actual thing is that it is impossible for us to go on in this hand-to-mouth way.'

And yet still she hesitated. Of course he could not know anything of her father's demeanour towards her during that interview—the cold exactitude of his phrases, his contemptuous references to the man who was about to become her husband. He could not understand how eager she had been that he would agree to her renouncing that allowance altogether; and with what a recurrent shame and mortification it was that she felt herself compelled, month by month, to receive money from such a source. And now—to sit down and write for more?

A happy idea struck her.

'Besides, it would be no use writing,' she said, 'for they are abroad at present.'

'Oh no, they're not,' he said, 'begging your pardon. Look at this.'

He handed her an evening paper, and showed her a paragraph in it—

'Sir Anthony and Lady Zembra have arrived in town from a protracted sojourn at Davos-Platz. They proceed next week on a visit to Dikeley Hall, Suffolk, the country residence of Isambard Zembra, Esq., of Red House, Campden Hill.'

Sabina recognised the style of the patient chronicler of the house of Zembra—Miss Renshaw, the governess, that is to say—and knew that the information was likely to be correct.

'It is a capital opportunity,' he said, with a little facetiousness. 'They're coming back flushed with their holidays; they'll imagine you've been cooped up in London all the time; and surely they will take pity on honest poverty. Oh, don't you be afraid of pitching the supplica-

tion pretty strong. What is the writing of a letter? Ten minutes' work—with a substantial reward if you do it well enough. And you may depend on it, it won't be preserved as a record against you. Sir Anthony won't show that letter about; it will be torn up directly he has read it. Why, wouldn't his constituents like to be told that the rich Sir Anthony allowed his eldest daughter the princely revenue of £12 : 10s. a month; and that she had to write to him for more? A pretty story for the local journals; a pretty cry at the next election. No, no; you may make your prayer as pathetic as ever you like; that is one thing about himself that he won't have sent to the public press.'

Well, for some time she sat in silent consideration; while he lit a cigar and proceeded to scan the contents of the evening paper. And if the truth were known, it was not Fred Foster, nor any of his wants or wishes, that finally overcame her deep reluctance and induced her to write to her father. It was of a great many other people she was thinking—honest, well-meaning people she took them to be, and industrious when they had the chance—who yet had fallen into untoward circumstances in the general fight of the world, and had come to look on her as their wisest counsellor and best and generous friend. The winter months would deal hardly with many of these poor folk. Scant food, scant firing, scant clothing would become the parents of illness; illness meant enforced idleness; it was those of them who were too proud to accept of parish relief who suffered the most, and needed the most skilful management, if they were to be helped at all. Then she thought of her own little store. Twenty-five pounds a month used to be abundance; but now that was cut down by one-half; moreover, there were a good many small incidental expenses connected with this modest establishment which she had hardly looked forward to, and which her husband did not seem to think it was his business to deal with. In point of fact, she had never yet received a farthing from him—though he had bought her presents, and would have bought her more, only that she protested against his extravagance. On the contrary, she had lent him from her small hoardings until (as she thought of

certain families she knew) she was almost afraid to see what a pittance was left; and if there was really a chance that her father would listen? It was scarcely asking for herself. It was rather begging for her poor ones. And so in the end she consented to write.

And yet as she wrote she could not help remembering her father's manner to her, and she was not very confident. Nor could she demean herself by making too piteous an appeal. No; she merely asked him to reconsider the arrangement he had made; and hoped that he would see his way to making her the same allowance that he had formerly made her, seeing that her marriage had not interfered at all, and was not likely to interfere, with those little charitable undertakings that used to have at least his tacit approval. And she trusted that his annoyance with her over the step she had taken would cease in time; she looked forward to that.

Sabina handed the letter to her husband, and he took it and read it.

'Well,' said he lightly, 'it's rather a business-like production, and there isn't much of the *ad misericordiam, in formâ pauperis* kind of thing in it; but I daresay it will do very well. The old gentleman is too much of a man of the world to continue a quarrel with his daughter over a hundred and fifty a year.'

He rose and got his hat and cane.

"Come along, Dame Durden,' he said, cheerfully. 'We'll post this letter so that he'll get it the first thing in the morning; and then we'll drive up to the Café Royal and have a bit of dinner.'

'Wouldn't it be much cheaper to have some little thing here?' she suggested—thinking of the lent sovereigns and her diminished store.

'Not for this negro minstrel. No. I may trust Mother Simmons as far as a boiled egg goes, or even a chop for lunch; but no further. Come along, I'm as hungry as a hawk.'

And very merry and cheerful he was as they went out, apparently taking it for granted that Sir Anthony would consent. Perhaps the borrowed sovereigns in his waistcoat

pocket added to his high spirits; at all events, when the letter had been posted, he would have Sabina get into a hansom—though she was quite willing to walk; and when they had got up to the café, and taken their places, he proceeded to order a little dinner that seemed to her quite unnecessarily prodigal.

'The question now lies between Burgundy and champagne,' he observed. 'What do you say to that Bollinger we tried the other day?'

'I won't have any wine, thank you,' she answered.

'Why not?'

'I would rather not have any, thank you,' she said simply.

'Well, that is pretty hard on me,' he remarked, with rueful sincerity. 'For when we have a whole bottle, I get two-thirds of it; but when I order a pint, it is only a pint. Come, Sabie, change your mind—I want you to drink good luck to Squire Tipton.'

'Really I would rather have no wine,' she said.

'Then a pint it must be,' he said; and he ordered that—while she had some water.

They had just finished dinner, and Foster was pulling out his cigar-case, when two friends of his came along, and nodded to him as they passed the little table. The one was a middle-aged shortish man, spare of frame, with a keen, weather-tanned face, prominent blue eyes, and a carefully waxed moustache; the other a tall young man, with rather flabby, clean-shaven cheeks, very light hair, vacant eyes, and listless demeanour. Both were in evening dress, their light overcoats being over their arm.

'Wait a minute, Raby,' Foster called after them, and they both turned; 'I want to introduce you to my wife—Captain Raby—Mr. Russell——'

The tall apathetic young man merely bowed; but Captain Raby said, 'Proud to have the honour of making your acquaintance, Mrs. Foster,' and stared at her so curiously that she dropped her eyes.

'I say, what are you after to-night?' Foster continued, regarding them both. 'Won't you come down and smoke a cigar in my diggings—in the Strand, don't you know?'

The shorter of the two gentlemen was still looking at Sabina—examining her almost.

'Delighted, I am sure,' he said, 'if Mrs. Foster will permit.'

'Oh, she doesn't mind a cigar or two,' Fred Foster put in instantly. 'Come along. We'll go down in two hansoms. Tell your man to follow us—we will show you where to pull up.'

In the cab Sabina said to him, 'Who are these two?'

'The little man is Captain Raby—a very good sort of fellow—and as sharp as a needle. He manages all Lord Tynemouth's turf affairs for him.'

'I don't like him,' she said.

'Why, you haven't spoken a word to him yet! Oh yes, he's a very good sort of fellow—and one worth knowing.'

'And the other?'

'Russell? Don't you know Russell and Schroeder in Oxford Street? Of course you do. Not that he has anything to do with the business: it's his happy occupation to spend the money that has been made in it.'

'He seems a soft-looking youth,' was Sabina's sole comment.

'Johnny Russell,' answered her husband, significantly, 'is a very valuable young man—an extremely valuable young man.'

When they had all arrived at the rooms in the Strand, Fred Foster became his own butler; and produced cigars, soda water, brandy, and also a pack of cards; while Captain Raby devoted himself to Sabina, staring at her as he spoke. It was sixpenny 'Nap' they were going to play; and nothing would do but that Sabina should join in; and she, being a good-natured kind of creature, consented; though in her manner there was a trifle more reserve than usually appeared there when she joined a friendly little game at the Wygrams' of an evening. Captain Raby appeared to care very little about the cards; he played mechanically and indifferently; and was mostly concerned in chatting across the table to Sabina—his talk chiefly consisting of little sarcastic comments about her husband

and his ways and doings. Moreover, whenever she lifted her eyes—as sometimes she did in a puzzled kind of fashion, for she understood the game but slightly, and was oftentimes uncertain as to what she should do—invariably she found his eyes regarding her, and that in a curiously familiar way. He said nothing to offend; but his manner was unpleasant; and Sabina gradually withdrew herself from any conversation, attending to the cards in a perfunctory way, and anxious only to escape. At last, when the mild youth had boldly gone Nap, and got it too, Captain Raby said, 'I'll tell you what we'll do now. Three Nap is as good as any. Now I don't think Mrs. Foster is having a fair chance. You haven't played much, have you, Mrs. Foster? Well, now, I will come and sit beside you and play your hand for you—give you advice, anyway—I would just as soon look on—and we'll see if we can't mend matters a little.'

He rose; but Sabina refused his offer on the ground that she wished to withdraw from the game anyway. She had a slight headache; she would rather leave them to themselves. There was a little bit of a scrimmage after this; the pale-faced youth timidly pleading with her to remain; Fred Foster laughing at her for being a bad loser; Captain Raby almost insisting that she and he together should play the same hand, and rout their foes. Sabina gently persisted, and with a little dignity too; she withdrew from the table to an arm-chair, and took a book; and then they continued the game by themselves, with the addition of a half-a-crown pool to increase the attraction.

They played late; Sabina wondering the while when they would go. And even after they had risen from the cards, Captain Raby would light another cigar, and would come and talk to Sabina in his gallant way, and promise to see that her husband got into no mischief down at Doncaster. Immediately they had gone, Fred Foster said to her, 'Well, Madam Dignity, what offended you to-night?'

'Oh, nothing in particular,' she said; and then she looked up. 'What is that Captain Raby a captain in?'

'He was in the militia, I believe.'

'I don't think he's a gentleman,' she said.

'Well, I like that,' Foster said, with a laugh. 'He's Lord Tynemouth's brother-in-law, at any rate.'

She made no reply to this.

'Perhaps you preferred the draper?' he asked.

'Mr. Russell? Yes, I preferred his manner very much. And I suppose he is no more feeble and foolish than other brainless young men of the same type.'

'Well, we're in a very hypercritical vein this evening!' he said, looking at her with some surprise. 'You'll have to learn, my dear, that the world is made up of all sorts; and one can't have one's friends all turned out regulation pattern. I suppose there are some Admirable Crichtons somewhere; but they don't abound in the Strand; and they won't play whist to lighten the journey down to Doncaster. The one isn't a gentleman, and the other is a fool? Well, fool or no fool, he managed to rob me of three golden sovereigns this evening that I shall have to get back from him somehow or other next week. Three golden sovereigns to an infant like that! No matter; we'll put it straight next week, I have no doubt. So you go away to bed now; and don't forget to pray that your father may arise in a blessed and heavenly temper to-morrow morning.'

CHAPTER XXII

WAYS AND MEANS

THE answer of Sir Anthony Zembra to his daughter's reluctant petition arrived just as she and her husband were going out for the evening. Mr. Foster had been presented with a couple of stalls at one of the theatres in the Strand; so he proposed that they should dine at a restaurant and go to the play afterwards. But the appearance of this important letter drove both dinner and theatre out of Fred Foster's head.

'Well,' said he with affected indifference, as she glanced over the contents, 'does Jupiter nod favourably, or is this another thunderbolt?'

Sabina did not answer; her face had flushed suddenly—with anger or indignation; and she folded the letter again quickly.

'Let me see it.'

He held out his hand; she withdrew an inch or two.

'No,' she said, 'you need not read it. He refuses. I thought he would—so I suppose it doesn't much matter.'

'And he says something about me that I am not to look at? Do you think I am a child or a fool? Let's see it.'

He took the letter from her and opened it, and read as follows:—

'DEAR SABINA—I think you are aware that I never waste words. I told you that you were free to go your own way, and order your life as you thought best; and I named the sum I was willing to allow for your own personal maintenance. I must decline to increase that sum in order to

enable you to support a lot of paupers—including your husband.—Yours truly, ANTHONY ZEMBRA.'

He laughed aloud; but it was a rueful kind of laugh.

'Pretty mad, isn't he? I thought the old gentleman would have become a little reasonable by now. Well, we'll have to wait—as best we can.'

It was the refusal of the money that chiefly concerned him; the insult levelled at himself he did not seem to mind in the least. Indeed, he threw the letter carelessly on to the table; took up his hat, gloves, and cane again; and then, when he was ready, he held open the door to let Sabina pass out.

'We'll have to hurry over this banquet,' said he lightly, 'if you want to see the beginning of the piece.'

All the same he was rather silent during dinner; and he did not seem to care much for the little comedy they went to see thereafter. When they got back to their rooms, and he had lit a cigar, and ensconced himself in a low easy-chair, he revealed what he had been thinking of all the evening by his first ejaculation.

'It is a confounded nuisance,' he said impatiently.

'Fred,' said she, 'don't you think we might manage to live a little more economically than we do, and so mend matters that way? Dining at restaurants is so expensive; if you didn't mind being content with what they can do for us here, you might have your own wine sent in, and that would make a great difference. And you know you are so dreadfully extravagant about cabs—or careless, rather, I should say.'

'Oh, it's no use talking like that,' he interrupted. 'Saving twopence-farthing here or there won't put matters straight. What I want to know is what income we can definitely calculate on.'

'But you know,' she said.

'What? what we have at present? Oh no, no; that won't do at all; that I look on as provisional; it was always understood to be so. Of course we can't go on like this.'

Well, she did not answer; though she might have

reminded him of her repeated warnings that Sir Anthony would prove implacable, of which his cheerful optimism would take no heed. Nor did she further insist on their cutting their coat according to such cloth as they had in the meantime; nor did she venture to suggest that he might turn his attention to some pursuit more settled and profitable than playing billiard matches and backing horses. For these considerations were obvious; and no man likes to be preached at.

'I am afraid,' said he, gloomily staring at his outstretched legs and the tips of his patent-leather boots, 'you've only made matters worse by writing that letter.'

'I am sure I did not wish to write it,' she said gently.

'No, of course not. I don't suppose you did. But people have often to do what they have no wish to do; and the best way then is to do it with as good a grace as possible. I think you might have made that letter a little more complaisant. There was no use showing you did it unwillingly—of course he would say, "Oh, this is a business communication; and I'll answer it as such."'

Sabina sat silent. It was the first time he had found fault with her. And she did not remind him that he had seen the letter before it was sent, and that, if it did not please him, he might have remonstrated then.

Nor was he inclined to be much more cheerful on the following morning, as he stood at the window and idly thrummed on the pane. Indeed the Strand early on a Sunday morning is not a sight to raise any one's spirits, even when it is flooded with London's sickly sunshine. It is like a city of the dead. The shops are shut; the buildings deserted; the pavements empty; at long intervals a solitary four-wheeler—looking somehow as if it had been out all night, and got lost, and was groping its way slowly home—comes stealthily along the hushed wooden highway, the footfalls of the horse sounding faint and distant. Mr. Fred Foster turned from that depressing spectacle, and took to the sporting papers he had purchased the night before.

And then he threw these aside.

'Look here, Sabie, something must be done. That letter has only made matters worse. Your father seems more

determined in his unreasonableness than ever; if you let him go on like that, it will become confirmed, and then good-bye to everybody's expectations. The mischief done by that letter must be undone somehow; and at once. Of course it isn't about any immediate and temporary thing that I am thinking—I daresay one could always put one's hand on a few sovereigns if there was need—it's the long future that I'm looking to; and something must be done. And it isn't merely doubling your allowance that has to be thought of; an additional twelve pound ten a month isn't a great thing; it's his attitude towards you. Your father is a very rich man; you are his eldest daughter; the only one married; it's absurd that he shouldn't do something substantial and handsome for you. Why, how would he like it to be known?'

'I don't think he would care,' said Sabina, who knew her father a good deal better than Mr. Fred Foster did.

'I say it is quite preposterous,' he continued, impatiently. 'You may ask why I don't appeal to my own people. But that's different. They're in the right mood; they'll do the right thing by and by. I don't want to press them just at present. My father is inclined to be cautious, and suspicious even; but the Mater's always on my side; they'll be all right by and by. But this other affair is very serious, looking to the future. And if you ask me, I think there's only one thing to be done.'

'What, then?' she asked; though this talk about money rather depressed her—she hardly knew why.

'You should go and see him—this very day.'

She started slightly.

'Yes,' he continued boldly. 'That's the proper way. Anybody can answer a letter; a letter can't make an appeal; a letter hasn't to be faced. Here you have such a chance—your father in town—you would be sure of seeing him in the afternoon—and then if you went and told him how you were situated, and put the thing fairly and properly to him, and were civil to him, how could he refuse?'

She was looking at him—with a strange, startled look.

'Fred,' she said slowly, 'would you have me go and ask money from my father after what he called you in that letter?'

He saw the surprise in her face, and the reproach too; perhaps it was the consciousness that these were not uncalled for that made him all the more impatient, and even vexed and angry.

'Oh, it's all very well for you to have romantic notions,' he said bluntly, 'but you'll find as you live longer in the world that they won't wash. Do you think I care what your father thinks about me? Not one bit. He may call me a hundred names in a day if he likes. Would you like me to tell you what I think about him? Perhaps you wouldn't. I daresay he wouldn't care either. But what's that got to do with giving him the opportunity of doing thé right thing by his own daughter? I don't ask for his money. It's as much your affair as mine. I want to give him the chance of acting like a reasonable human being; and it isn't to-morrow or next day that I'm thinking about, but of a very long future, as I say.'

Sabina's eyes were downcast now; her face was somewhat pale.

'There are some women who are well off,' she said; 'they can earn their own living without taking a penny from any one. I wish I could do that. I would work hard enough.'

'There you are with your romantics again,' he complained. 'What would you like to do? Stitch shirts at ninepence a day? Or stand behind the counter in a telegraph-office?'

The maidservant came in with breakfast, so that conversation had to cease. But he knew that he had spoken with unnecessary harshness; and when breakfast was over, and he had taken up one of the sporting journals, he began to excuse himself a little.

'I only want you to exercise a little common sense, Sabie,' he said. 'People must put their pride in their pocket at times. Of course a noble self-respect is a very fine thing; and if I were a duke, with £100,000 a year, I should worship myself like a little god, and expect everybody else to do the same. But poor folk like you and me, my dear, can't afford to have more than an ordinary, decent, Christian-like allowance of pride—no, we shouldn't have

any if we are to be like Christians—we should practise humility; and if people call us ugly names we should say that probably we deserve them. Bless you, what harm can the calling of names do you? Besides, he said nothing of the kind to you; I was the happy recipient——'

'Do you think I make any difference of that kind?' she said quickly; and there was no humility at all, but a wounded and indignant pride in the expression of the sensitive mouth and the beautiful clear eyes. 'No, when I read that, it was as if—as if he had struck me!'

'Oh,' said he coolly, 'you must cultivate a little wholesome indifference. You'll never get through the world at all if you are so thin-skinned. Besides, if you consider he has done you an injury, or me, or both of us, don't you think it would only be magnanimous to give him the chance of atoning?'

'You would have me ask for money—after that insult?'

He did not answer; for he did not wish to get angry again; so he returned to his newspaper; and Sabina took up a book and read till it was time to go to church. She went to church alone.

When she returned they had lunch together; and Foster was again in a somewhat fretful mood.

'I don't see why you should look at it in that way,' he said, just as if the subject had never been dropped. 'The only thing that pride does is to keep up family quarrels. It's absurd that your father and you should be on such terms; and how is the situation to be altered so long as you have these high-flying notions? Any other girl would go to her father and make it up in five minutes. Can't you look at it that way? Put the money out of the question. Here is a Sunday; your father will be at home this afternoon; why not go and make up a family quarrel?'

'Fred,' she said—and the distress that was in her face was a piteous thing to see—'don't ask me to go!'

'Then you give the whole thing up?' he asked.

'You see what he says,' she pleaded. 'Could anything be more distinct?'

'Oh, very well—I suppose it's all right.'

After lunch he took up his hat and cane, and said to

her, 'I'm going along to see Dick Raby, to fix about the train to Doncaster to-morrow. I suppose one must try to pick up a few sovereigns somehow.'

'Shall I wait till you come back?' she asked.

'Oh no; not if you have anything to do. Most likely I shan't be back till about seven.'

When he had gone she sat for some little time pondering over these things. And perhaps there was some cause for his vexation? Perhaps she had not told him clearly enough what manner of man her father was, and warned him with sufficient distinctness that any resolve of his would be final? And perhaps, when he asked her to go and make a personal appeal to her father, he did not quite understand the humiliation that would involve? Men were less quick to perceive such things than women. If he had known what that interview must necessarily mean, surely he would not have asked her to go?

By and by—and still in a somewhat thoughtful mood—she put on her things, and went out, taking the underground railway down to Kensington. She had just turned into Kensington Square when she caught sight of Janie coming away from the house; and it was very grateful to her (for she was a little depressed somehow) to notice the quiet look of pleasure that instantly appeared in Janie's wistful eyes.

'Oh, Sabie, this is so kind of you! All the morning I kept saying to myself, "I wonder if Sabie will come this afternoon?"'

'And that is why you left the house?' Sabina said with a smile.

'Oh, but I meant to be back in time. I did not expect you so early.'

'And where are you off to?'

'Will you go with me, Sabie?' she said eagerly. 'I was going up to Walter Lindsay's studio. I had a letter from him yesterday morning, and he reminded me that I offered to go up from time to time and see that everything was going on all right. Won't you come? It will be a nice walk. And mother's lying down just now. We'll have tea when we come back.'

And so Janie found herself once more walking along Kensington High Street with her beloved Sabie; and up the Campden Hill Road; and over to Notting Hill; and proud and pleased she was; and on this occasion (as on many a former one) all the talk was of Walter Lindsay.

'And where is Mr. Lindsay now?' Sabina asked, to humour her.

'Still in New York. He is having a caravan built for himself—a studio on wheels, you know—and when that is quite ready, he is going away—oh, I don't know how far. But he is to send me his address from time to time—just in case there should be any news for him; and you know the news he will look for; it's news about you, Sabie.'

'Don't talk nonsense,' Sabina said, but not ill-naturedly. 'What news could he want to hear about me?'

'That you are well and happy—I think that's all he would want to hear.'

'You are a very sentimental young woman, Janie, and imagine things,' Sabina said. 'Now I want you to talk about something practical. You remember taking me into a place in Oxford Street—an art-furniture place——'

'Maragliano's?'

'Yes. You remember the hand-painted china we saw—the dessert-service, and so on; now do they pay well for that kind of work?—would it be worth while for any one to try and get some of it to do?'

'I know Mr. Hutton, the manager; I will ask him,' said Janie, never doubting that this was but another of Sabina's numerous schemes for benefiting somebody or other.

'I suppose they have inferior sets,' Sabina continued, 'where very high artistic skill would not be necessary. I used to draw and paint a little, years ago. I could copy things anyway. There were some flowers on vases that I think I could do.'

'You?' said Janie, in amazement. 'You yourself, Sabie? What do you want to do that kind of thing for?'

'Well, the truth is,' she answered, 'I'm afraid that Fred and I will have to pinch a little. We shan't be very well off, you know; and I was wondering if I could help;' I

might fill in a little time that way, at night, if I were clever enough. I wonder if it is difficult.'

'Filling in time?—yes, you are so idle! And you would work at night, too, when you get home dead tired! What next, Sabie?' her friend said indignantly. And then she added, with a sharp look, 'Whose scheme is that?'

'My own, of course. Will you ask Mr. Hutton if he will let me have one or two simple things? I don't expect much—there are too many unemployed young women looking out for work of that kind—but even if it was a little I should be glad.'

'I know this,' said Janie boldly—and as they were come to the gate of the house, she paused there for a moment, and regarded Sabina without fear—'I know this, Sabie, that I could get you one customer who would buy all that you could paint, even if he had to lock it up in chests and never see it again; yes, and pay you like a king for it, even if he had to sell house and land and pictures and everything. Ah, you don't know what he said to mother—that time of the supper in this very house—or did I tell you?—about the falcon?—and how he envied the Florentine young gentleman who had the chance of sacrificing his falcon for the sake of his sweetheart?'

'But what has that to do with me?' Sabina said.

'You don't know, then, that that supper was given all in your honour; and that everything he could get in England was got for you; and I think he was quite sorry he wasn't poor, that he might make some real sacrifice for you? Ah well, Sabie, I will say this for you—you made him very happy that one evening.'

'You are incorrigible,' Sabina said good-humouredly. 'Why, you may depend on it that at this very minute your hero is making love to one of those American girls—they're pretty enough, to judge by those of them who come over here.'

Janie would not answer; she rang the bell, and they were admitted. The housekeeper was very civil; offered them tea; was pleased to hear news of Mr. Lindsay; and reported the small incidents that had happened since he left. Then Janie got the key of the studio; and she and

Sabina passed through the little garden, opened the heavy door, and entered the gaunt, strange-looking, musty-smelling place.

'He was right—it wants a little airing occasionally. Different from the night that you were here, Sabie, isn't it? See, there is the Chippendale cabinet in the corner; but you won't find in it the rock-crystal cup you drank out of —oh no, that's away in safety with his other valuables. Maybe he has taken it to America with him.'

'Do you know, Janie,' Sabina said, out of pure mischief, 'I am beginning to believe that you are in love with Mr. Lindsay yourself.'

'Don't say that, Sabie, even in joke. Besides——'

She hesitated. But was not this a rare opportunity for revealing a great secret.

'Besides what?'

Janie's pale face flushed, and the wistful eyes were a trifle beseeching.

'There's some one else!' Sabina cried. 'So that's it? Oh, Janie, why did you never tell me? Or is it quite a new affair? Well, then, who is he?'

'Did you never guess, Sabie?'

'Never, never!'

'Not when you saw Philip Drexel coming about the house?'

Now this Philip Drexel was a young figure-painter, whose ambitious style and defiant mannerisms had attracted some little notice, though Sabina had paid no great heed to him. But now she was greatly interested, and would know all about the engagement, though Janie protested there was no such thing, but only an understanding, that was not to be made known to anybody as yet. And Sabina had abundant praises for the young painter; and would make Janie promise to bring him to the rooms in the Strand, so that she might better get to know him; and altogether was highly pleased.

'But you know, Sabie,' said the honest-minded Janie, with a demure smile, 'I'm not too proud about it. I don't think his approval of me is too much of a compliment. You know they've asked him to send in two or three

pictures to the Grosvenor Gallery next year; and—and he came to mother and asked her if I would give him some sittings for one of them—"Mariana in the South" it is to be—and he said something about me being quite an ideal type for him. Well, I don't think it's too complimentary—do you, Sabie?—for you know he paints such dreadfully ugly women.'

'Oh, I don't think so at all,' Sabina said instantly. 'Why, I've heard people speak most highly of his pictures. And of course he'll make his Mariana ever so much prettier than any of the others.'

'Sabie, you can say such nice things!' the girl said; and gratitude was near bringing tears to her eyes; for she knew that she was not very beautiful.

Well, the promised visit had been paid to both house and studio; and they went back to Kensington Square, and had tea with the old people; and in due course Sabina returned to the lodging in the Strand. Mr. Foster, when he came in, announced that he would be going down to Doncaster by an early train the next day. He made further reference to the project of her seeking a personal interview with her father; though once or twice he threw out hints that he hoped the trip to Doncaster would repay him—otherwise things might be getting a little 'tight.' Sabina, on her part, made no reference to her vague fancy that she might earn something by painting on porcelain; indeed, if the scheme were practicable at all, she would have preferred sitting up at night to do the work, when no one knew.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT A MUSIC HALL

HOWEVER, as it turned out, Fred Foster returned from his visit to Yorkshire in the most radiant good-humour; his Doncaster speculations had turned out very well indeed; and not only did he faithfully pay back to Sabina every farthing that he owed her, but also he promised that after settling-day she should have twenty-five pounds to be devoted entirely to her charitable enterprises. Nay, more; he said that, as he did not expect to be away from town again till the Newmarket Second October Meeting, he would go with her on her rounds, and see how she was getting along; and he thought he would begin by having a little serious conversation with a certain non-working man down Hammersmith way about whom she had told him, and who was neglecting his wife and family in a shameless fashion.

'Or don't you think that a thundering good licking would knock the laziness out of him?' he asked cheerfully.

'I don't know,' said Sabina. 'But I am afraid it would not look well if I had to go to the police-court to bail out my husband. What would Mr. Bridge think of me? And, you know, he is very good to me. I can always have an officer of the court with me, if I want to make any inquiries——'

'Oh, I am going to be your officer of the court,' he said gaily, 'and we'll begin to-morrow morning. In the meantime we're going to have a little celebration of our good luck this evening. Captain Raby has gone up to the

Bristol to order a bit of dinner—just the four of us, you know—Raby, and Johnny Russell, and you, and I——'

'Please leave me out, Fred,' she said at once.

'Why?'

'Oh well, I should simply be in the way. You don't want a woman at a man's dinner-party of that kind. It would look ridiculous. Besides, you will have your own affairs to talk over. I shall do very well here; I find no difficulty in passing the time.'

'Oh, nonsense!' he exclaimed. 'Why, the whole thing has been got up to please you. It was Raby's proposal, and I expressly accepted the invitation for you. Look ridiculous?—why, it will be in a private room; we shall be quite by ourselves. Come, Sabie, don't be a kill-joy just as things are looking a little brighter.'

'Oh, very well,' she said good-naturedly. 'But I believe you would have a merrier party without me.'

'Don't you think anything of the kind,' he said. 'You're not one of the straitlaced ones. And if you knew how glad I shall be to have a bit of decent dinner—to take the Doncaster taste out of my mouth. Perhaps you yourself wouldn't like to live on ham sandwiches and pork pies and butter-scotch?'

Sabina did not answer this question; for she had to go and smarten herself up somewhat. Very much rather would she have stayed at home; but she was pleased to see her husband in such high spirits; and she certainly had no wish to play the part of kill-joy. Indeed, she made herself as neat as possible; she would do him credit.

Nor did Sabina's presence seem to act as any damper at the modest little festivities that took place at the Bristol Hotel. All three of her companions appeared to be highly pleased with the result of their Yorkshire trip; even the vacant-eyed Johnny Russell—whose flabby and clean-shaven face was a little more flushed than usual, ceased to be voiceless, and was nebulously anxious to interest Sabina in one or two topics not connected with the turf. It was Captain Raby who kept the coolest head; but to make up for that he seemed bent on encouraging Fred Foster's out-

bursts of gaiety; and, of course, as host, it was his duty to pass the wine.

'You don't know, Mrs. Foster,' said he, with that familiar stare that invariably caused Sabina to lower her eyes, 'you don't know what your husband did for us down there in the north. He was quite a blessing to us. After this week he ought to be called The Infallible.'

'Why, that is the name of my paper!' Fred Foster cried at once. 'Didn't you know I was going to publish a racing newspaper? Just you wait and you'll see. And of course I'm going to run the business of sporting prophet as well—here, Johnny, lend me your pencil, and we'll get out the manifesto; we're all in it, you know, for I never desert my friends.'

The apathetic young man detached a massive gold pencil from his watch-guard and handed it over; and for some little time Mr. Foster was engaged in the throes of literary composition, while Captain Raby considerately endeavoured to amuse Sabina. At last the back of the *menu* was pretty well filled; and then Mr. Foster read out his address to the public:—

'Mr. FRED FOSTER, proprietor of *The Infallible* and sporting telegraphist. Mr. Foster may now confidently appeal to the racing public for their continued support, as his marvellous and repeated success beats all previous records (see my last year's Cesarewitch week, and the brilliant feat of placing the first, second, and third for the Two Thousand, Derby, and St. Leger). A special number of *The Infallible*, devoted to the Middle Park Plate, is now ready; and for the nominal sum of five shillings will be supplied to all applicants, along with subsequent issues to end of season. . . . FINALS. NEWMARKET FINALS. Mr. Fred Foster, having just returned from a professional visit to the chief training centres, is prepared to give sound and reliable advice on all the great races yet to be run; but would especially advise his patrons to secure his final telegrams for the Newmarket Meeting at the trifling outlay of one sovereign for the week. Mr. Fred Foster is above the vulgar arts of the ordinary prophet; scorns to advertise himself by newspaper puffing; and obtains his information

without chicanery. Address—Mr. Fred Foster, No. —, Strand, W.C.'

'There, now, how's that?' he asked, regarding the paper with some pride.

'I think "God save the Queen!" should come in at the end,' observed Mr. Russell.

'Let's have a drink over it anyway. Pass the champagne, Raby. And here's the health of Squire Tipton—may his shadow never grow less!'

They had lit their cigars by this time (with many apologies to Mrs. Foster), and then coffee came in, and liqueurs; and there was a period of comparative repose—Fred Foster sipping maraschino and occasionally hazarding a remark to Johnny Russell about the probable starters at Lichfield and Manchester; Mr. Russell listening in a vacuous silence, and also sipping maraschino; Captain Raby entirely devoting his conversation to Sabina, if that can be called conversation which was chiefly a series of stories, more or less discreditable, about very distinguished people. Mr. Fred Foster began to find this slow.

'Look here,' he said, 'we can't talk horses all the evening.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Captain Raby, instantly.

'I propose we go and get a private box at the——,' said he, naming a well-known music hall. 'We can smoke just as well there; and there's always something going on. There are those children on the bicycles—very pretty that is. And Kate Tremayne—well, it's rather early for her yet, but she'll be on by and by—and she's always fun. What do you say?'

He addressed Captain Raby; that gentleman was regarding Sabina with a look in which there was a little affected surprise and amusement.

'Oh, that is not for me to decide,' said he, gravely. 'It is for Mrs. Foster to say whether she would like to go.'

It was a kind of a challenge. A hundred times would she rather have gone back home, and busied herself with her own affairs; but that half-scornful look of Captain Raby's had annoyed her; and she said at once, 'Of

course I will go, Fred, if you want me to go with you. But wouldn't you rather go by yourselves?'

'Oh no, no,' the phlegmatic young man said, with unusual warmth.

'I'm afraid we can't get a domino and mask for you, Mrs. Foster,' said Captain Raby, smiling in his saturnine fashion. 'And yet they would be useful if they were allowed. I don't think you would care to be seen at the——'

Taking no heed of him, she calmly awaited her husband's decision; and he said forthwith, and rather impatiently, 'Of course you won't be seen at all! We'll put you in a corner of the box; there's a curtain—of course you won't be seen. And don't you believe all that's said against music halls by people who have never been near them. There's sometimes very good music. And anyway it passes an hour—and—and you can smoke—and—and Kate Tremayne—well, if she isn't funny enough for anything——'

'We shall have Mrs. Foster's opinion of Miss Tremayne by and by,' observed Captain Raby; and the tone in which he spoke more than ever determined Sabina that she would make the best of everything she saw or heard in that music hall, Miss Tremayne included.

And yet it was a hard task; for anything more contemptible—anything more insulting to the commonest intelligence—than the amusement provided in this place of entertainment it would be impossible to imagine. The mean knowingness, the swagger, the vulgar braggadocio with which the performers appealed to their audience, were a sorry thing to see and hear; and indeed Sabina, safely ensconced in the corner there, and looking abroad over that mass of young men, and lads, and young women too, all drinking in this wretched stuff, was moved far more to pity than to any sort of disdain. When the person on the stage—a big, overweighted, crapulous-looking creature he was, with a head like an unboiled haggis, in-knees, and an enormous paunch—sang his famous song of 'Englishmen—one to ten,' those white-faced, narrow-chested, gin-bemused boys took up the chorus with him—

'We've fought before; we'll fight again;
We'll sweep the land; we'll sweep the main;
We're Englishmen,
And, one to ten,
We'll stand and bid the world come on!'

'Poor wretches,' Sabina said, half to herself, 'there's not much fighting stuff in them.'

However, there was little that was really offensive in this blatant pseudo-patriotism; it was during subsequent performances that Sabina's face fell; and she began bitterly to regret having, from a passing wish to defend her husband, ever come to such a place at all. Moreover, he had left her now. Just as Miss Rosa Lee had finished her favourite song of 'Tandem Tommy' (Miss Lee appeared in a Newmarket coat of yellow satin, with enormous brass buttons, a jockey's cap on her head, and a coaching-whip in her hand; and her also the audience aided with the well-known refrain—

'And the chorus-girl she kisses me,
As we spin along the road'),

and was retiring from the stage amid loud applause, there was a tapping at the door of the box. The next moment there appeared a gentleman in evening dress, with a large diamond in his shirt-front, and a very shiny hat. It was clear that he had not expected to find a lady in the box, for the moment he caught sight of Sabina he said, 'Oh, I beg your pardon,' and was about to retire.

'Come along, Morgan,' Fred Foster said at once. 'Let me introduce you to my wife—Mr. Morganti.'

Mr. Morganti gracefully removed his shiny hat, showing the diamonds on his fingers the while; but he seemed a little bit disconcerted, and still inclined to withdraw.

'Do you want to see me, old man?' Fred Foster asked, getting up from his seat.

'If you can spare me a couple of minutes.'

When they had gone away together Captain Raby said to Sabina, with his peculiar smile, 'I suppose you don't know who that was who had the pleasure of being introduced to you just now? That is Mr. Morganti, the

manager of this establishment. Mr. Morganti is a very important person; and his acquaintance is esteemed a high honour by many people. I am told that the young ladies who are engaged to perform here become very affable when you are introduced to them by Mr. Morganti; and that they will condescend to drink a little champagne, and even bring their husbands to join in—that is, when they've got one; and you may, perhaps, be allowed to drive the whole family-party out to Richmond of a Sunday. They will entertain you certainly, if their wit lacks a little refinement.'

'I daresay there are as honest and well-intentioned people amongst them as among any other class,' Sabina said coldly.

'Intentions? Oh yes. Their intentions are all right, I suppose. Their manners are a little—well, affable. I should not wonder if at this very moment Miss Rosa Lee was begging your husband to give her a good thing for the Cesarewitch. They're very fond of racing, the people about music halls. Miss Kate Tremayne, who is about due now, was married to Jim Older, the jockey. *Was* married; Jim got out of that engagement, luckily; and Miss Tremayne is free to let her fancies roam. I am informed she is a very lively young person.'

Sabina's heart was hot within her with vexation; but she was too proud to show her anger. And how could she forbid him to talk to her? And what escape was there for her? Her husband was away. The phlegmatic Russell was wholly engrossed with the stage, staring vacuously at the successive performers, to the neglect of his brandy and soda. Moreover, had she not herself to blame? Had she not come of her own accord into this polluted atmosphere?

However, she obtained a temporary respite; for now Miss Tremayne appeared; and Miss Tremayne was so popular a favourite that even Captain Raby condescended to bestow a little attention on her. She was attired in all kinds of cheap finery; her name was Bank Holiday Ann; she was supposed to be a maidservant set free for a jollification on Hampstead Heath; and she proceeded—in a voice about as musical as the sharpening of a saw—to

describe the adventures of herself and her companions, there and elsewhere. As these included the getting drunk of the whole party, their being locked up for the night, and their appearance before a magistrate the next morning, there was no lack of incident; while the longspoken passages, delivered in a rapid jargon of Cockney accent and Cockney slang, seemed to find much favour with the audience, who also heartily joined in the chorus—

'Bank Holiday Annie,
Bank Holiday Ann,
Up the Heath,
And down the Heath,
And round the Heath she ran.
When the p'leeceman copt her,
She got him one on the eye;
O Annie, I'll tell your mother,
O fie, Annie, fie!'

But the idiotcy of this performance was refinement itself, compared with the 'humour' of the leering cad who followed, whose vile innuendoes were so obvious that even Captain Raby had to talk rapidly to Sabina, about all kinds of things, to distract her notice. Probably, if Sabina had understood, she would have been a little bit thankful; but his attentions to her seemed now to have reached the height of persecution; and as the atmosphere and surroundings and associations of the place were grown quite insufferable, she could only impatiently ask herself when her husband was coming to take her away. At last she said, 'Captain Raby, I wish to go. Do you think you could find my husband?'

'Well,' said he, blandly, 'I am not a *habitué* here; I understand that Mr. Morganti has a private room somewhere, where he keeps excellent cigars and spirits, but I have not the honour of the *entrée* into it. No doubt your husband is amusing himself well enough. Don't you think you had better stay? It ought to interest you, especially to study the kind of amusements that are popular with the masses of the people. Can't I get you something—some coffee?'

Sabina was rather paler about the lips than usual.

'Mr. Russell!' she said.

'I beg your pardon?' the younger man said, turning round at once.

Then she drew back; she had no wish to be left alone with Captain Raby, and he, noticing her hesitation, instantly rose.

'Oh, if you really wish to have your husband found, I will do my best,' he said; and he put on his crush-hat and left the box.

In a few minutes he returned with Fred Foster, who was in a gay mood.

'Well, what have you all been doing? You're not going yet, Sabie? I've been transacting a little business with my noble friend, Morgy——'

'Was Miss Tremayne a party to the transaction?' asked Captain Raby, with a glance at Sabina.

'Kate Tremayne is a rattling clever girl—that's what I call her. All London has got hold of that chorus. She'll make a pot of money in the provinces. Do you really want to go, Sabie?'

'Yes.'

'Then we'll all go,' said Johnny Russell, rising. 'I've had enough, for one.'

At the front door, when the cab was called up, she was for parting with these two acquaintances with a polite bow; but both of them insisted on shaking hands with her; which ceremony she performed with a marked coldness. As soon as they were in the hansom, and were driving away, Fred Foster said to her, 'Well, what's the matter now?'

'It is of no consequence.'

'Come, out with it! I saw you had got on your high tragedy air. I guessed as much from what Raby said.'

'You have no right to ask me to meet a man like that,' Sabina was stung into saying. 'His conduct, his manner, is insufferable. And as for that place where we have been, why did you allow me to go there? You knew what it was—I did not.'

'You said you wanted to go.'

'I said I would go if you wished me to go; I wanted to show them that what was right for you was right for me; do you think I would stand by and have Captain Raby

openly sneering at you? But you needn't have taken me to such a place for all that.'

'Oh, you're one of the impossible ones,' said he, but with perfect good-humour. 'I know what has set your back up —the appearance in that box opposite of the gorgeous creature in green velvet and diamonds. Well, her get-up was striking, I admit; and so was her yellow hair, and her fan; but you know you can't compel everybody to tone down their appearance. Besides, I made certain you couldn't see the woman at all.'

'I did not see any such person,' Sabina said, with absolute truth.

'Then what's the matter? There was some very good singing. That sketch of Kate Tremayne's was awfully clever—as like the thing as could be; it was too like for me, indeed; I couldn't follow half what she said. Low comedy, of course, but still comedy; and a precious deal nearer real life than the comedy of the regular stage. I didn't see anything to object to in the performance.'

'Perhaps you were otherwise occupied,' she said. 'You did not consider how pleasant it was for me to sit in that box and have Captain Raby suggesting that you were at the time making bets with the women behind the stage.'

'Raby will have his joke,' he answered cheerfully. 'He was simply roaring when he came and told me of the expression that had come over your face. And what there was to offend you I am sure I can't imagine.'

Indeed he was bent on laughing off the whole affair; and when they had got home, and when he had donned his dressing-gown and slippers, and lit a cigar, and mixed some whisky and water, and drawn his chair in towards the fire, he proceeded to remonstrate with her, but in a perfectly friendly and pleasant way, about her cultivation of impossible ideals and standards of conduct.

'The trouble with you, Sabie, is simply this,' he observed, 'that you are a great deal too good for this wretched and sinful world.'

CHAPTER XXIV

DIVERGENT WAYS

BUT next morning found him in a very different mood. He was silent and surly at first; then he began to remonstrate with her for her priggishness, as he chose to call it; finally he adopted a distinctly injured tone.

'Of course a man doesn't like to be laughed at. I shouldn't wonder if, the next time I see these two, it was to be "Hallo, Foster, how's Saint Cecilia? Come down from the clouds again? You shouldn't take that kind of a person to a music hall." Well, I'm not any fonder of music halls than other people, but I didn't see anything to offend you so mightily; and as for Raby and Russell—what did you expect? You expect too much, that's where the trouble is. You want people to live up to ideal standards that are quite impossible. Wouldn't it be a little more sensible to take the world as it is? And it's all the more extraordinary in your case, for you haven't been brought up in a glass house or a nunnery; you've seen plenty of life——'

'I have seen a great deal of poverty, if that is what you mean,' Sabina said calmly. 'But poverty is not contemptible.'

'What is contemptible, then? Whatever doesn't come up to your perfectly impossible standards? Well, I prefer to take the world as it is. I never professed to live in a select circle of archangels; I never met any; ordinary men and women are good enough for me.'

She did not answer him; perhaps she had done him an injury in the sight of his friends; perhaps he had cause to

complain. And perhaps, too, that was the reason he made no further reference to his proposal that he should accompany her down to Hammersmith; on the contrary, when he had lit his after-breakfast cigar, and got his coat and hat and cane, he merely said that he would be back as usual in the evening, and so he went his way.

Sabina was a little down-hearted that day, Janie Wygram thought; and as they were walking along the former confessed that sometimes she grew dispirited, and began to doubt the efficacy of the network of charitable associations that were trying to do something to lighten the misery of the great city. Perhaps it was true that the weakest must go to the wall; that the vast social forces must work out their own salvation; and that all attempts to interfere with them were useless, or useful only in handing on a legacy of incompetence to the next generation? Of course she did not say so in these words; but that was the drift of what she said; and very much astonished and grieved was Janie Wygram to find her in any such hopeless mood.

'Why, that's not like you at all, Sabie!' she exclaimed. 'Don't you remember what you said—that one single act of kindness done every day in the week made the world just so much better? I don't think you see yourself half the good you do; but I know what it would be to me, if I were lying ill, to have you come in and talk to me for a minute or two. Oh yes, I have heard plenty of that kind of argument—that charity only perpetuates sickness, and creates paupers, and so forth. But I don't see how trying to make people well is helping on sickness; and it isn't making paupers to get people into situations who would otherwise be idle; and as for the social forces——' Here Janie paused for a moment, for the subject was a large one. 'Well, I don't know much about the social forces; but I should think if they saw ragged brats taken out of the gutter, and washed and clothed and educated, and turned into those fine young fellows on board the *Chichester* and the *Arethusa*, well, then, the social forces ought to be very much obliged. Oh, don't you give in, Sabie, whoever gives in. If you only knew what you are in many and many and many a home!'

Settling-day came and went, but Fred Foster forgot about the twenty-five pounds he had promised Sabina; and she did not choose to remind him; she would rather try, by practising the most rigid economy, to get along with what she had. And at this time, indeed, Mr. Foster had need of all available funds; for the racing world was very busy just then, as it always is, towards the close of the season; and he was away a good deal in various parts of the country. He went down to the Manchester Meeting. Then came Newmarket, where his usual good luck deserted him; both the Cesarewitch and the Middle Park Plate hit him hard. She heard of his having paid a flying visit to Scotland. He was for a few days at the Duke of Exminster's training quarters at Helmingsley. Then he returned to Newmarket for the Cambridgeshire Handicap. And always, amid these various and continued engagements, when he chose to run up to town to those snug little rooms in the Strand, Sabina was ready with the kindest welcome for him, and was assiduous about his small comforts, and there was no look of reproach or of appeal in the calm and serious and beautiful face.

'Oh, mother, what has come over Sabie?' Janie Wygram said one evening (and now there was another admitted to these colloquies—a young man with a pale face, large, earnest eyes, and long hair; Philip Drexel was his name; and he was no impatient listener; when either these two or any others of the women down Kensington way were singing the praise of Sabina, as sometimes they did, the young artist's voice was eager in the chorus; and he stood unrebuked of Janie; nay, he knew it was the one sure way to win her favour). 'She has been quite different of late,' Janie continued. 'No one sees it as I do, for no one is so much with her. She never laughs now—never, never; and she is never impatient and masterful with the people, or scolding, as she used to be; but always so gentle with them; and so grave and compassionate; and her face —well—well, her face, I think, is more beautiful than ever, but there is a kind of sadness and loneliness in it that I can't understand; and sometimes she will walk ever so far with you without a single word, though the moment

you speak she is as patient and kind as ever. I don't think he actually ill-treats her——'

Here Janie's mild eyes flashed, and her lips were rather pale.

'No, if I thought that, I would get Philip to go and smash him, or I would—I would ask Walter Lindsay to come across the Atlantic and kill him. I don't think it's that; but she is very much alone; and perhaps her marriage hasn't turned out what she thought it would—though she won't allow a single word to be said. Why, she is not the least like the Sabie Zembra we used to know! Don't you remember her—so merry, and proud, and courageous, and just bewildering people with her pretty face and her good-humour. That was when Walter Lindsay wanted to paint her—the maiden queen, you know, in scarlet and ermine —was it from Chaucer the lines were?'

Janie should have remembered that there was another artist listening, who had also thought of Sabina as the central figure of certain half-imagined compositions. Even at this moment was there not before his mind some faint and wavering vision of

'The groves
Where the Lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret, and Rosalys.
Circlewise sit they, with bound locks,
And forehead garlanded;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robes for them
Who are just born, being dead.'

'And there's another strange thing,' continued Janie, who was never tired of talking about her best-beloved, 'she has nothing like the nerve she used to have. You know Sabie was never very sentimental; I used to think her a little too robust in that direction. But now a very trifling thing will bring tears to her eyes, though she is desperately anxious to hide it. The other day we were going through Stanhope Gardens. There was a window open; and some children

were singing, with the mother leading on a harmonium; and I stopped Sabie for a minute. Well, it was "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;" and, do you know, the singing of the children quite upset her, and she went on quickly so that I should not see. You know, mother, that's not like Sabie; she never was sentimental; I believe it is loneliness that is breaking her heart. There's that little boy Watson that was run over; he came back the other day from Brighton—she had sent him to the Convalescent Home for a fortnight—and she went down to see how he was. Well, it was a little bit affecting to see how bewildered he had been by the sight of the sea, for he had never before been out of London in his life; but Sabie is used to such things; and I've seen her pretty sharp sometimes with women for crying aimlessly; but this time, when she said to the poor little fellow, "Well, Johnny, tell me what you thought of the sea when you first saw it," and when he said, looking up at her, "Please, miss, I thought it was like 'evin," she stopped for a minute uncertain—of course not wanting to break down—and then she had to turn away, and I saw her dry her eyes. Mother, it is not the least like Sabie to be in a nervous state like that, is it?—she who was always so full of courage and bright humour and briskness. Of course, there is one thing: you know she had sent him down for a fortnight; and it's five shillings a week at the Black Rock House; and I know she was debating whether she should not let him have another fortnight; and then she thought she could not afford the other ten shillings. And, perhaps, when she saw what a treat it had been to the poor little fellow, she was sorry she had not given him the other fortnight—getting the money somehow.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Wygram bitterly, 'and her father rolling in wealth; and her husband drinking champagne with his dinner every night in the week; and that poor creature saving every penny to do good to others. It's little the world knows how selfish the people may be that are drinking wine and flaunting about in carriages——'

'I'm sure they might flaunt about in carriages, or drink all the wine in the world, if only they'd make Sabie a little happier,' Janie said wistfully. 'I think she grows more like

an angel every day, in her goodness and gentleness; but do you imagine I like it? No, I don't. I would rather have her bad and wicked——'

'Janie,' the mother remonstrated; but she added with a smile—'Well, it's no use talking like that about Sabina, for it can't mean anything at all.'

'Very well, then, mother, I will say this only—that I wish she was a little more like the Sabie Zembra we used to know. Sometimes, when I look at her now, my heart is pretty heavy about her. And I am not as near to her as I used to be; she seems to live within herself, somehow; and there's never a word said; her husband's name is hardly ever mentioned—when it is, Sabie is always on his side, and has excuses for his being away, and all that. But she is not like our Sabie that we used to know.'

Now, if Sabina was ever ready with excuses for her husband's absence, that was a good deal more than Fred Foster cared to be. He took it as quite natural, in their straitened circumstances, that he should try to pick up a few sovereigns in the only way known to him; and he plainly intimated that if she chose to occupy most of her time in looking after other people's affairs, he, at least, preferred to attend to his own proper business. Once, indeed, he offered to let her accompany him. It was on the eve of the Brighton and Lewes race meetings.

'What do you say to going down for the week, to have a look at the old place?' he said. 'You would find it lively at this time of the year—the King's Road in November is pretty brisk. We could put up at the Bedford—I like the coffee-room——'

'Thank you, Fred, but I think I would rather not go,' she answered.

'Why? I suppose because you don't want to meet Raby or any of those fellows. Well, you wouldn't. They'll be at the Old Ship, if they are at Brighton at all. Don't you think you would be safe enough at the Bedford? There's a ladies' room you might shut yourself up in, if you're so terribly afraid.'

She took no heed of the taunt.

'It isn't that. But I'd rather not go,' she said, gently.

'Oh, you grudge the time, I suppose? You can't tear yourself away from your beloved slums?'

'No, it isn't the time either,' she said. 'It is the expense. I should not feel very happy about it; so please don't ask me.'

'Oh, well, you can stop at home if you like,' he said; and there was an end of that proposal.

However, matters mended very much at Christmas, for they were to spend that holiday with the old people; and whatever was best in Foster's nature and disposition invariably came to the front when his mother's influence was brought to bear on him. A few days before Christmas the old lady came to town, to do some shopping and take her daughter-in-law back with her; and as soon as she had installed herself in an old-fashioned little hotel near Charing Cross that is much patronised by Buckinghamshire folk, she hurried along to see Sabina. She had arrived earlier than was expected; Fred Foster was out; she found Sabina alone.

'My dear, my dear,' she said with some concern, and she took the girl's two hands, and kissed her on both cheeks, and drew her to the window, 'you're not looking at all well! What is the matter? Have you been ill?'

'Oh no,' Sabina said—and for the moment her face was all lit up with gladness at finding this kind friend near her again; there seemed comfort in her mere presence.

'But this will never do—we must see whether the country air can bring back the roses to your cheeks,' said this gentle mother-in-law, and she kept patting the girl's hand. 'And every time you wrote you wrote from London—have you never been away from London since we saw you?'

'No,' she answered. 'But you know I am quite used to that.'

'But you shouldn't be used to it,' Mrs. Foster said sharply. 'I suppose Fred has been flying about the country just as he ever did?'

'He has been away at times,' Sabina answered evasively.

'And how has he been behaving?' the elder lady said, with some little scrutiny in her eyes. 'Pretty much as

usual, I suppose? Yes; but we thought he was going to turn over a new leaf when he married. And so glad I am that you are coming down to us now, for you will have to be the peacemaker—indeed you will, my dear.'

Sabina looked up inquiringly.

'That wretched boy has been getting into trouble again with his father,' the mother said, with a rueful leniency. 'Writing for money I suppose; and never a word about Crookfield, or settling down anywhere else. Indeed, my dear, I think it's mostly on your behalf that his father is so angry; so you'll have to be the peacemaker—and you'll find it easy enough with that pretty face of yours.'

The old lady now made Sabina sit down, and took a chair opposite to her, and proceeded to open a somewhat capacious and country-looking purse.

'Now, my dear, I have brought you a little Christmas present; and I know what is most useful to a young housekeeper, being a housekeeper myself.'

She took out a little packet of bank-notes, all neatly folded, and bound together with a tiny elastic band; and then she counted them.

'Yes, ten; and as each is a ten-pound note, you mustn't leave them lying about, my dear.'

She put the little packet into the girl's hand, and closed her fingers over it.

'Dear mother, it is so very good of you,' Sabina said—and her eyes were grateful enough. 'If you only knew how much I shall be able to do with it—just at this time, too—I confess I was a little down-hearted about going away into the country and leaving so many small things undone. And I will be very, very careful. I suppose I may take ten pounds for myself, if I give the rest to Fred.'

'What!' the elder woman cried instantly. 'You foolish child, I tell you that that is for your own private purse, every farthing of it! To Fred! Well, I used to help Master Freddie a little, but I'm done with him now, until he settles down and conducts himself like a respectable married man. For your own private purse, my dear, every farthing of it!'

'Ah, but you don't know,' Sabina said with downcast

eyes. 'I shall be glad to give it to him. I wish it was in a clearer sense my own. I wish it came from my family.'

'Why?'

The girl hesitated; then she looked up in a piteous way, as if appealing to this kind friend not to misunderstand her.

'Don't think I am saying anything against him, or would mean to do that,' she said timidly. 'But—but sometimes I cannot get it out of my head that Fred appears to think I married him under false pretences. He wouldn't say it,' she added instantly. 'But—but sometimes he seems to think it—and—and of course—if he really was quite certain that my father would do something more for me than he has done—well, the disappointment is only natural. Dear Mrs. Foster, I shall be so glad to give him this money; but don't you understand how I could wish it to be more clearly my very own to give?'

'I understand more than you think,' said Mrs. Foster, angrily. 'Has Fred been worrying you about money?'

But Sabina would make no such admission; she evaded that question and a good many others that Mrs. Foster put; and indeed the arrival of Fred Foster himself shortly brought these suspicious inquiries to a close.

For the sake of variety, they went down to Missenden by the familiar old omnibus that still starts—or recently started—from the Bell in Holborn—that is to say, they leisurely drove away down by Uxbridge, and Chalfont St. Giles, and Amersham; and they had not left the great city far behind when the fresh, sweet-smelling country air began to be very grateful to Sabina, who had been so long pent up in the town. Both the ladies were outside, for this was a very mild December; and though there had been rain in the night, there was now a clear, watery sunshine flooding the wide landscape; and what wind there was touched the cheek softly enough. And the farther they went away into the open country the more beautiful, it seemed to Sabina, everything became; there was a strange clearness abroad; and a multitude of colours to delight the eye. The gray-green of the commons; the deeper greens of holly and ivy; the russet of withered beech and withered fern; the purple

red of the haws; the scarlet berries of the bryony; the black berries of the elder; the white waxen-like berries of the mistletoe high up on some gnarled old apple-tree—all these were shining in this humid sunlight, that seemed to call up vapours and pleasant scents from the long swathes of ploughed field and fallow. Of course, long before they reached Missenden night had fallen over the land; but it was not much of a winter's night; Sabina regretted that the day's drive had come to an end.

And very speedily it appeared that there had been some rather serious quarrel between father and son; for the old gentleman would scarce take any notice of Mr. Fred Foster; but devoted his whole attention to Sabina, making her his constant confidante and companion. During these next few days Sabina nestled down into this quiet domestic life with a curious unwonted sense of comfort and peace. For a long time back she had found herself very homeless and very lonely; and now these good people were surrounding her with every possible little kindness; and she was abundantly grateful. Even Fred Foster, in the society of his mother, showed himself in the best of humours; and by dint of sheer audacity succeeded in establishing some better relations between the old man and himself. He went out shooting most of the time—picking up a stray bird or a hare occasionally; while Sabina talked to the old gentleman in the greenhouses; or walked arm-in-arm with Mrs. Foster through the dank, faint-smelling garden.

It was on one of these latter occasions that the old lady again broached the subject of the young people coming and settling down in the country. Sabina paused for a moment in their walk, and regarded her friend with a somewhat wistful look.

'I almost think it would be better,' she said. 'I used to fear it would be selfish—to give up everything, when there is so much that can be done to help people who are greatly in need of help. And I suppose it would be selfish. But I find now that I cannot do as much as I used to do; well, the mere want of money interferes, though money isn't everything in that kind of work. And one feels the need of a home—where one can rest at times.'

'Oh yes, yes, yes, my dear,' the old lady said with eager kindness. 'I am sure you are right. Of course, you want a home. And Crookfield could be made so nice and comfortable for you; just the prettiest place imaginable; and far enough away, too, to save you from intrusion—you wouldn't have an ill-natured old mother-in-law coming prying and poking her nose in at every minute. But you may depend on this, my dear child, that anything my husband or myself could do to make you perfectly happy—well, it would be done pretty quickly, I think.'

'Ah, you are all too good to me down here,' Sabina said with a bit of a sigh: she was thinking of her life in London.

But as soon as Mrs. Foster found a convenient opportunity she went to her son.

'Fred,' she said, 'do you know that Sabie is quite willing to live in the country?'

'Oh, is she?' he responded, with some indifference.

'Now don't you think this would be a great chance for you to give up your idle life?' she pleaded. 'Even to get a proper home for Sabie would be something. She is not looking well at all. She wants rest and quiet.'

'Do you mean at Crookfield?' he asked, with a smile.

'Yes, I do.'

'Then you don't know what you're talking about, mother. She would be sick and tired of it in a week. Her heart would be back in those slums, where she spends the whole of her time and every farthing that she can appropriate with decency. As if there was such an abundance of money flying about!'

'But what is this about money now?' his mother asked. 'She says that you are disappointed. Did you ever look forward to living upon her income?'

'I looked forward to our joining our not immense fortunes,' said he, with much equanimity, 'so as to share the domestic expenses. It's a usual kind of thing, I believe.'

'And now you are disappointed with her because her father will not give her as much as you expected?'

He did not answer this; he was busy filling some cartridges.

'At all events,' his mother said, warmly, 'you have no right to say that she deceived you, or to think it even—she is incapable of any such thing—you should be ashamed to imagine such a thing.'

'I don't know what you mean!'

'Well, perhaps it is a mere fancy on her part—I hope it is—I hope for your own sake it is; but I know what she thinks—she thinks that you have got to imagine that she married you under false pretences.'

'Oh, she thinks that, does she?' he said, carelessly, and he locked up the cartridge-box and put it aside. 'Well, I never said so, anyway.'

And with that he got his cap and went out, whistling for the retriever that was lying asleep in the yard.

CHAPTER XXV

ALTERED PLANS

On their return to town Sabina gave her husband £80 out of the £100 she had received from the old lady; and this came in handy; for, if there was no racing just then, he was busy enough with pigeon-shooting and billiards, and also there was a little speculation going on about the Waterloo Cup. But it must not be imagined that he was in any wise grateful for the gift. He knew very well that, had Sabina not been in the case, he would have had the whole of that sum; and he knew that the twenty pounds would be frittered away on objects of which he wholly and sulkily disapproved. For he had come to grumble not a little about her work in the slums, and her attendance upon charitable societies. It was a mere waste of time and money, he said. A married woman ought to devote herself to her own home. On the rare occasions on which he had returned to their rooms at mid-day, he had found her almost invariably absent; and there was a difficulty about luncheon; for the landlady was unprepared for such contingencies. To be sure, Sabina had offered to be at home every day at one, if he wished it; but this again was absurd; for how could he bind himself by any such hard and fast rule? As regards the money, were they in a position to indulge in indiscriminate charity? Moreover, her rigid economy (which he declared to be perfectly ridiculous) was in a kind of way a standing reproach to him. It seemed to accuse him of extravagance, whereas he was merely living as always he had lived. It made him look foolish in the eyes of his friends, when they passed Sabina and himself in a restaurant, that he should be drinking wine

and she only water. Why should she not drink wine? She would be ready enough to prescribe it for sick people down in Hammersmith; why shouldn't she prescribe it for herself, seeing that she was looking none too well? He saw no virtue in self-sacrifice; it was a pure delusion; the best thing for everybody was for each to do the best for himself.

In the meanwhile these representations took no practical shape, for now came the hurdle-racing at Kempton and Sandown and Croydon to engage his attention—with the Lincoln Spring Meeting looming in the near future; and he was absent from town a good deal; and Sabina was left to the freedom of her own solitary ways. But when he came back he said to her one evening: 'Look here, I've been thinking things over, and I don't see that we get value for our money out of these rooms.'

He did not, at any rate.

'They are expensive; and it's an expensive way of living, as you say—dining at restaurants and all that; when we started them, of course, I expected we should have a wider margin, but I suppose that is all over now. Well, now, didn't I understand from the Mater, when we were down in Buckinghamshire, that you were willing to live in the country?'

'It was a kind of fancy,' she said, absently.

'But either you did say you were willing or you didn't,' he retorted, with a touch of impatience.

'Yes, I said I thought it might he better,' she answered, with a little hesitation. 'They were very kind to me down there. I liked the quiet life. If I were only thinking of myself——'

'Well, then, I take it you are willing to live in the country,' he said, interrupting her. 'And I think you are quite right. It will be much healthier, and cheaper too, if it is properly managed. I will look out for a convenient little place, not too far from town——'

She looked up in some bewilderment.

'But don't you mean Crookfield?'

'Crookfield!' he said with a laugh. 'Crookfield! I should think not! Ten miles away from the nearest railway

station! No, thank you; I don't want to play Robinson Crusoe.'

'But it was about Crookfield your mother was thinking when she spoke of our going to live in the country,' Sabina said—not seeing how she had been entrapped.

'Oh yes, I know. She said so. But I don't propose to turn farmer; it's the worst-paying game there is nowadays; my father will do much better to take whatever rent he can get for the place. I want quarters much more convenient than that—near to Epsom, perhaps—Banstead is handy—or Leatherhead—anyway we must not get beyond the pale of civilisation altogether.'

And so Sabina had pledged herself—without too closely asking herself why—to forsake all those pursuits and occupations that had been the solace of a somewhat lonely life, to leave her friends behind her, and to go away into the country, she knew not whither. Of course, when she announced this startling intelligence to Janie Wygram, she had to adduce reasons. It was her husband's wish, to begin with. They had found their means a little straitened; they would be able to live more economically. Then her husband had complained of her spending so much of her time away from home; perhaps they would be more together in the course of a country life. These and several other reasons she placed before Janie; she did not add—perhaps she would not have confessed to herself—that she was sick and sore at heart; and that she had welcomed this change, as she would have welcomed any change, in a kind of despair.

Now this is what Janie Wygram instantly said to herself, 'The contemptible brute!—he grudges her every farthing that she pinches and saves out of her own income; and he is carrying her off to the country so that he may have every penny to himself.'

But this was what Janie Wygram (who was a loyal lass, and had not forgotten Walter Lindsay's parting injunctions) said to Sabina: 'Ah, well, Sabie, I daresay he is a little bit jealous of the time you give to other people. It's only natural, isn't it? And then he is quite right about the healthier air; and you haven't been looking your best of late, you know. Dear

me, I wonder what Kensington will be like without you. There was always the chance of meeting you in the street somewhere. I never went out of the house without thinking, "Well now, perhaps Sabie is just coming round the corner." And there's many and many a home will miss you, Sabie.'

Sabina was standing at the window, looking out on the wintry trees and bushes of Kensington Square, and her back was turned to her friend. When Janie went to her, and put her arm within her arm, she was greatly surprised to find that the girl's eyes were filled with tears.

'Sabie, you are not glad about going!' she exclaimed breathlessly. 'It vexes you? You are not happy about it?'

Sabina dried her eyes quickly.

'Oh, it will be all right,' she said. 'I daresay it will be all right. When there are so many real troubles in the world it is no use bothering about sentimental ones.'

'But you don't want to go!'

'I suppose the whole of life is more or less of an experiment,' Sabina said, 'and you can't tell how any part of it may turn out. I hope this will be for the better.'

Janie looked at her, wondering whether she was going to speak more plainly, and yet almost afraid. But the calm and beautiful face was quite passive; and the hazel eyes—that used to be so clear and shining with mirth, or filled with a soft and benignant kindness—were now almost apathetic, not to say hopeless.

'You will have to be very good to my poor people, Janie,' she said, with an effort at cheerfulness. 'You know their ways. And you will be more patient with them than I was.'

'Me?' said Janie. 'And you think I could ever take your place? It's little you know what you have been to them, Sabie. It isn't money, mind; as far as that goes, there would be no great difficulty. For do you know what Philip has done?—he is such a noble fellow! You remember, I told you that Walter Lindsay had written over to say that it would be a great favour to him if we would occupy his house after we got married. And you know,

Sabie, Philip is pretty well off; his people are very well off indeed; and he himself has been very lucky in getting commissions—he is very popular in Liverpool and Birkenhead, where they've plenty of money to spend on pictures—so that when I told him of Mr. Lindsay's offer, he laughed at first, and didn't like the notion of having a house rent-free. But it happens that the studio is the very thing he wants; and he is so very busy that he can't bother about building one for himself at present; so he came to me the day before yesterday and said that as soon as we were married we would settle down there, only that he would prefer paying rent. And where was the rent to go to? Walter Lindsay would not take it. Well, it was to be handed over to you and me, to help deserving people. Wasn't that kind? So, you see, it isn't the money. But when you talk about my taking your place, it's little you know. It wasn't money so much as courage you brought them. They did whatever you asked them to do. Will you come and bid them good-bye before you go, Sabie!'

The girl's lips quivered for an instant.

'No,' she answered. 'What would be the use? That would be mere sentiment. What is the use of sentiment?'

'It would be kindness, Sabie. And you never refused them that.'

There was no answer. Sabina had got into the habit of late of leaving conversations unended; her mind seemed much preoccupied.

On the morning after Fred Foster's return from the Lincoln and Liverpool Meetings he was standing at the window of their sitting-room, looking down into the Strand. It was rather a cheerful sort of morning for March, and there was a springlike feeling in the air. After a while he turned to Sabina.

'I have to run down to Epsom—to Witstead, rather,' said he, 'to see some friends of mine there about a little bit of business. Would you care to go for the day? I daresay they would give us some lunch; and we could come back in the afternoon.'

Now this was a most unexpected proposal; for never once, since the unlucky episode of the music hall and

Captain Raby, had he offered to introduce her to any of his associates; just as never once had he brought either friend or acquaintance home to these lodgings. But Sabina assented forthwith, and cheerfully; and she went away to make herself as neat and smart as possible; and was resolved to show herself grateful for his consideration, and as amiable as might be. In the hansom going down to Victoria Station he said rather apologetically, 'You know they're not very distinguished people, those Deanes we are going to see. But they're good enough kind of folk; and the world's made up of all sorts; we've got to take them as they are.'

The apology was unnecessary; Sabina was determined, not upon taking them as they were, but upon making the best of them, whoever they might be. And indeed the little trip promised to be very pleasant. Once away from London, the clear country light was a cheerful thing to look at; and the air that blew in at the carriage-window was mild and sweet; and she could not but think that along the hedgerows there—in the sheltered places—or on the warm sunny banks—or in the clearances of the woods—the firstlings of the year must be appearing now: the red dead-nettle, the ground ivy, here and there a patch of pale primroses, a sweet violet half-hidden among the withered grass. She would like to have brought a dozen or so of the children she knew, and turned them loose into these wooded lanes. Fred Foster was reading a newspaper; and she had leisure to picture them straying through the drier glades, or chasing each other over the wide commons. She could almost hear them laughing. It was a spring day, fit for children, and children's delights.

They were received at Witstead Station by Mr. Deane himself, who seemed to have dressed himself in a gay fashion for this occasion. He was distinctly a horsey-looking man, of about five and thirty, with a thin, dried, good-humoured face, small, clear eyes, and neatly-cut whiskers. Towards Sabina he was particularly civil, not to say obsequious; told her that he had that very morning been reading a speech of her father's; and—though they differed in politics—he considered it a remarkably able

speech, remarkably able. And might he have the pleasure of introducing his wife, who was waiting outside the station with the pony-chaise? Mrs. Deane turned out to be a buxom and rather pretty little person of about eight and twenty, with cheeks like the rose, merry blue eyes, and a manner that was chirrupy and cheerful to the verge of audacity. And as the gentlemen preferred to walk, Mrs. Deane would have Sabina take a seat beside her in the pony-chaise; and then they drove away together—towards the little straggling village of Witstead, that is dotted in a staccato fashion along a bit of the Guildford road.

The distance from the station to the village is barely over three-quarters of a mile; but Fred Foster and his companion would appear to have walked rather slowly—no doubt talking over their business affairs; for before they arrived at Wayside Cottage, the mistress of that small establishment had had time to introduce Sabina to her family, as she called her miscellaneous collection of pets. Other family had she none; but these afforded her sufficient interest and occupation, what with her cockatoos, and white mice, and love-birds, and marmosets, and squirrels, and kittens, and canaries. Indeed, by the time that the voluble and roseate little woman had expatiated on the merits and virtues and tricks and failings of this host of favourites, and by the time that Fred Foster and his companion had finished their talk in the little bit of front garden overlooking the front road, Mrs. Deane begged to be excused, for that now she had to be off to get luncheon hurried up.

Well, Sabina was not much interested in these good people; but she was in no wise offended by them; and during this little banquet she tried to be as amiable and responsive to all their kindness as she well could be. Of course Mrs. Deane monopolised most of her attention; for Fred Foster and his friend were discussing the recent University Boat-race, and also certain wrestling contests then going on at Lillie Bridge. And soon it appeared that this gay and rubicund little lady had a most astonishing acquaintance with what was to the fore in the way of amusements in London. She knew all the pieces at the theatres; she had heard all the new music; from Muswell-

hill and its racing to the Crystal Palace and its fireworks, she and her husband seemed to have been everywhere and to have seen everything.

'I should have thought,' Sabina said, in some surprise, 'that you would have found it difficult to get much to the theatre—living in a remote place like this——'

'Bless you,' said the other cheerfully, 'that is the advantage of living anywhere within a reasonable driving distance of Epsom; the late trains make it so easy. Did you think we were buried alive down here? Oh, I think we know a little of what's going on in town.'

'So it would seem,' Sabina said, smiling.

On the other hand, whenever the conversation was general, Mr. Deane's manner towards Sabina was most deferential; and he warmly expressed concurrence with whatever she said; and was pleased to grin when that happened to be something cheerful. Nor, when luncheon was over, could he be induced to light a cigar in that room, though everybody else was willing that he should do so; he refused flatly, and said that he and Foster would smoke on their way over to the stables of a great house near by, which they had promised to visit. Then, again, instead of at once following Fred Foster out to the front gate, he found a chance of calling his wife aside, and said quickly, 'Mind this, Susie, if you're singing any songs now, be a little careful. Don't have any of the "a little-later-on-in-the-evening" kind, there's a good girl.'

'Don't be alarmed,' said Mrs. Deane, with a cheerful little giggle; 'I'm not going to sing any songs. I'm going to take her for a drive to Box Hill. I think she's an awfully nice girl. Whatever made her marry Fred Foster?'

'Women do strange things,' her husband said. 'I suppose it was the accident that brought it about.'

'Then there's another thing, Jim,' she said. 'I wish you wouldn't allow Fred Foster to jump on you. What right has he to patronise you? Ain't you as good as he is? —well, I should think so! Just you cheek him a bit—it'll do him all the good in the world. You keep him in his place, Jim. His wife's worth a dozen of him—set him up!'

When the two husbands were gone their wives got into the pony-chaise, Mrs. Deane taking the reins; and presently they were driving away along the Surrey highway, on a spring day that was pleasant enough, with its purple clouds, and silver light, and warm, humid air. And somehow Sabina preferred Mrs. Deane in the pony-chaise to Mrs. Deane at table; for in the pony-chaise she looked so trim and neat and jolly, whereas at table she had a trick of trying to eat and speak at once—a practice which saves time, to be sure, but is not otherwise to be admired. They drove away down by Mickleham and Juniper Hill and Burford Bridge; then they struck off the main highway to make the ascent of Box Hill; and here Mrs. Deane surrendered the reins to Sabina, to let the patient and stout little cob face the long zigzags at his ease, while she took a bee-line up the hill with a lightness of foot that showed she was used to the neighbourhood. She got in again at the top; and then they made away for Headley Heath and Walton Downs—in no wise hurrying the drive, indeed, for they had plenty of time, and the day was mild for March.

The blithe little Mrs. Deane seemed rather curious to learn in what measure Sabina was acquainted with, or interested in, her husband's pursuits, though here Sabina was reticent enough; and also she wanted to know how a mere bicycle accident should have led to acquaintanceship, and then friendship, and then marriage.

'I wonder whether he will be quite up to his old form next week,' she said.

'But how?' Sabina asked.

'In the steeplechase.'

'What steeplechase?'

'Why, don't you know? The Spring Steeplechase at Manchester. I fancy that this is the first one he has ridden since that accident; that's a long time for a man to be kept away from what used to be his favourite hobby. The loss of money, too; a hundred to nothing is a nice little bet when one is hard up.'

'Do you go much to races?' Sabina ventured to inquire.

'I? Not I! The ordinary race-meetings are no use

for women at all; the men are after business—not after lunches and swell gowns and gloves. But when your own set have pulled off a good thing, and the men are back in town, then you may have a very nice time; they're free-handed then; easy come, easy go; there are a good many little presents about. But the bookie wins in the end—yes, and all along the way, too; it's no good the clever ones thinking they can stand against the market odds, though they may have a stroke of luck now and again. Your husband was awful lucky last year.'

'Was he?' Sabina said, and then, as that sounded as if she were strangely ignorant of her husband's affairs, she instantly added, 'Yes, I believe he was. They say he is a very good judge of horses—and—and the one he has a share in did very well last year, I believe. But I don't understand much about it.'

'The less you know the better,' said Mrs. Deane, curtly. 'I've heard a good deal too much.'

In course of time they got back to Wayside Cottage, and found that the two husbands had returned; and as there was a train due in about half an hour, they did not take the pony out; they merely stopped for a cup of tea, and then Mrs. Deane drove Sabina to the station. Fred Foster arrived there a few minutes afterwards; and presently they were on their way back to town.

'A nice little cottage, that?' he said inquiringly.

'Oh yes,' she answered.

'I should think the garden would look pretty in the summer.'

'Yes; and they have a good deal of fruit, Mrs. Deane says.'

'What kind of a trap was that—comfortable?'

'Very.'

'And the cob?—it seemed to me a nicish-looking beast?'

'It is very quiet,' Sabina answered; 'and very willing at the hill work.'

'Ah,' said he, 'I'm glad you approve of the place, for I've just taken it over from my worthy friend Deane.'

'Do you mean we are to live there?' Sabina said, somewhat aghast.

'If you are to live anywhere at all in the country, I don't see where you could get a prettier place, or a more convenient,' he said, cheerfully. 'And we may have it at once. They're removing to Newmarket. Mrs Deane doesn't know as yet, though; guess she'll tear her hair—and his too—when she's told; for she is rather fond of a little fling in town. And I've taken over the cob and pony-chaise, too, though it's needless to say I haven't paid for them yet. If the beast is quiet, you'll have no trouble about driving him; it will be quite an occupation for you.'

And thus came to an end Sabina's mission-work in London; she was no longer an 'angel in the house,' or, rather, in many, many houses. She was now merely Mrs. Foster, of Wayside Cottage, Witstead.

CHAPTER XXVI

A MESSAGE

No sooner was Sabina installed in her new home than she began to try to make it as neat and pretty and attractive as might be; and she had plenty of leisure to do so, for, as it happened, Fred Foster had to be down at Northampton just at this time. And no doubt through all these little preparations there ran the wistful hope that on his return he might perhaps be a little more kind and considerate towards her than he had been. Nay, she began to take herself to task, and to seek reasons for his apparent discontent with her. Perhaps her character was somewhat too severe? Perhaps it was true that she had impossible standards of duty and conduct, that only served to disconcert people? Perhaps she ought to aim at being a little more like Mrs. Deane, whose robustly merry spirits seemed to please her husband very well? Perhaps she was too straitlaced—too exacting—not tolerant enough of other people's ways and opinions and pursuits? For Sabina could hardly believe that this alteration in his manner towards her was due merely to disappointment over money matters. Why, before marriage, what she had chiefly admired in him was his courageous cheerfulness in making the best of any circumstances. It is true that his mother said on one occasion, 'Well, Sabina, I am afraid Fred is a spoiled child, and I am afraid I am partly responsible for it; but he is very good-humoured and nice so long as he has his own way.'

But surely he was having his own way now? She had given up all the interests of her life to please him; she

was ready to obey his slightest wish; she would try to mould her character, her opinions, her conduct, in any direction that would be agreeable to him. And perhaps, when he returned, he would be a little more kind to her? —and remain a little more with her? And she would not forget to be grateful to him for his not insisting on her personally going to seek money from her father.

But when Fred Foster's mother heard of their removal to this furnished house in Surrey, she was exceedingly angry, and wrote a long and indignant letter to Sabina about her son's perversity, as she chose to consider it. On Foster's return from Northampton, he found this protest awaiting him, for he had enjoined Sabina to preserve for him all letters coming from his mother; and when he had read it, he pitched it back impatiently on to the chimney-piece.

'Yes,' he said, turning to Sabina, 'I suppose you wrote complaining that it was a lonely place—that there wasn't enough society for you.'

'Oh no, Fred, I did not,' she said, rather timidly. 'I —I—said I was afraid you would find it dull; it was about you that I wrote——'

'Oh, you may make your mind easy about me,' said he, carelessly. 'You needn't imagine that I am going to sit down and bite my nails—or plant kidney beans. I can't afford it. Our circumstances aren't so flourishing as all that; I must be about just as much as ever; you needn't bother about me.'

Then he began to make inquiries about the arrangements she had made with the Epsom tradesmen; and it was clear that he meant this household to be conducted with a view to economy.

'Of course,' said he, 'the simplest way to pay Jim Deane for the cob and the pony-chaise would be to sell them both; and that would save old Noel's wages, besides the keep of the cob——'

'But how should we get the things out from Epsom?' she asked.

'You could send the girl in by train at a pinch. Or I daresay most of the Epsom tradesmen have carts. But I

shan't decide on that yet; we'll see what Newmarket does for me. Oh, by the way, if you have any questions to ask of Mrs. Deane, just jot them down on a piece of paper. I shall see her to-morrow night most likely.'

'Are you going away again, then?' Sabina asked, without raising her eyes.

'Yes; I'm going down to Newmarket to-morrow.'

So Sabina was left once more alone; and somehow she was more hopeless now, as she tried this or that bit of additional decoration within doors, or sought employment outside in helping the little old man who worked in the garden when he was done with the stable. At first she had got this ancient to drive her in the pony-chaise—in his faded livery; but he was not very communicative; and she preferred being alone; and so she took to driving by herself—going considerable distances sometimes—and letting the cob walk for the most part. In this way she became very familiar with the not over-peopled neighbourhood surrounding her, with the Commons of Stoke and Leatherhead and Esher, with Fitcham Downs and Mickleham Downs, with Headley Heath and Walton Heath, and all the scattered little hamlets and nooks and byways to which she could gain access. It was a solitary life for a young woman to lead. Her ostensible object was the gathering of wild flowers for the adornment of the cottage parlour. The cob would stand patiently enough in the lanes, or on the open heath, while she explored the hedgerows or the broken sandpits. But sometimes she forgot this pursuit—oftenest when she had got up to some height from which she could look northwards across the wide, undulating, wooded country; and then she would remain there motionless, silent, absent-minded, until she felt helpless tears swimming into her eyes. For she was looking across that wide landscape to London town, where still she had one or two friends.

One day her solitude was broken in upon; for Mrs. Wygram, and Janie, and Janie's artist-sweetheart all came down to see her; and as this was the first time that Sabina had acted as hostess in her own home, she was very proud and pleased, and the excitement of seeing them brought quite a flush of animation to the pale and sad face. As for

Janie (after one quick, nervous, anxious look of inquiry directed to Sabina's eyes), she declared that the little cottage was most charmingly pretty; the neighbourhood was delightfully picturesque; the air so sweet after London; the blossom on the fruit-trees so beautiful. She would go into the garden, and was interested in the smallest details; she went into the stable and patted the cob; she thought the little maidservant such a pretty-looking country lass. But when they had got indoors again, and when Sabina had gone away for a couple of minutes to superintend lunch, Janie said sharply, 'Philip, why do you stare at her so? I wish you wouldn't stare at her so!'

'I think she is more beautiful than ever,' he said absently. 'But it is a rarer kind of beauty—something finer—— Janie, I don't know why, but to me she hasn't the look of a happy woman.'

'Oh, don't say that, Phil!' Janie exclaimed. 'Don't say she isn't happy!' And then she fought with her own fears. 'Why, of course she is happy! What did you expect? You've seen Sabie before. She's not the giggling barmaid kind of person. Why shouldn't Sabie be reserved and—and—and—refined—and—and quiet in manner? Did you expect her to giggle?'

'Janie!' the mother said; and the warning was only given in time; for just then Sabina made her appearance.

But surely this gentle hostess was not unhappy? as she sat there at the head of the table, smiling and talking to her friends, and rather bewildering the young artist with the graciousness of her look and address. He was accustomed to seek his inspiration from many sources; but he could not quite get at the secret here. Was it her eyes—that were so frank and generous and kind? Or was it the proud set of the head and neck—as she seemed to incline a little in order to listen to her next neighbour? Her shoulders and the lines of her throat were magnificent, he could see easily enough; but that was merely physical and obvious; that had nothing to do with the subtle charm and sweetness of her presence. Wherein lay the mystery, then? Was it her disposition? But a plain woman might have a beautiful

disposition without possessing this nameless attraction. Or was it association? There was something in the Madonna-like forehead and in the calm of her eyes that seemed to suggest the ideals of the early Italian artists—the serene loveliness—the sadness, even, with which they had endowed their imaginings of the blessed among women. He thought he would like to have a look through the National Gallery. Janie would go with him; it would be a pleasant task for her to seek out something resembling Sabina's expression in those visions and dreams of the painters of an earlier world.

After luncheon was over, Sabina took Mrs. Wygram away for a drive in the pony-chaise, considerately leaving the two young folks to go for a walk by themselves. And they had plenty to talk over—at least he had; for he was telling her of the various Italian cities he proposed they should visit on their approaching wedding-trip; and he was debating whether it was better to arrive at Venice at night or in the morning. Which was likely to be the more striking to her who had never been there at all—the hushed mysterious blackness of the canals and the gliding by of the hearselike and half-invisible gondolas; or the splendour of the dawn widening over the great lagoon, and making a wonder of the islands and the tall campanili and the domes and the palaces? He did not address his conversation to her direct; he talked as if he was looking at some one away along the road; perhaps that was the reason he did not perceive that Janie was paying him but scant attention. At last he said to her, 'Why are you silent? What are you thinking of?'

'I was thinking of one night at Walter Lindsay's,' Janie answered, with a sigh. 'Ah, if you had seen Sabie that night! I never saw her so—so radiant. But I suppose the world changes to every one.'

'Oh, as to that,' said he, 'I don't know that she has changed so much for the worse. Of course I don't want to say anything against her, or else you'd be up in arms in a moment; but the Miss Zembra that I used to see sometimes—well, everybody could recognise her beauty—that was apparent enough—but I confess that she was just

a little too straightforward in her manner for me. 'There was a kind of want of sensitiveness somehow that is difficult to explain; she was just a trifle too direct and frank——'

'She was a healthy and high-spirited young woman,' Janie said warmly, 'and very busy; with little time to study small details or think of what she was saying; but she was, always and always, just graciousness and goodness itself!'

'Oh yes,' he said. 'Yes, I suppose that was so. But I can't help thinking there is a finer touch about her now——'

'I suppose you think it is fine to be unhappy!' said Janie, rather bitterly. But she instantly drew back from that proposition—or rather, from the suspicion implied in it. 'Oh no, I hope she is not unhappy,' she said. 'Her husband seems to be away a great deal, certainly; and she may be feeling lonely there; but, you know, he is mad about horse-racing and such things; and as soon as he has run through the little money that he has, then he will be compelled to stop, and begin and live a more domestic life. In the meantime,' Janie added plaintively, 'if he doesn't want her, I wish he would give her to us. Ah, wouldn't you like to see Sabie again in Kensington Square!'

Sabina seemed to be loth to part with her visitors that afternoon.

'You will come up for the wedding?' Janie said, shyly, as they stood together in the railway station.

'Oh yes; and for the Private View at the Grosvenor?' said the young artist, who seemed to consider these two events as of about equal importance to him.

'Sabie, do you remember the Private View at the Academy last year?'

There was no answer to the question, for the train came in just then; and presently these good people were on their way to London, and Sabina was slowly driving back to her solitary home.

Her next visitors were of another complexion. Fred Foster came back, of course, for the Epsom Spring Meeting; and as he was leaving on the first morning, he said to her, 'Most likely some of these fellows will be coming

along to-night for a smoke and a drink, but that needn't bother you; you needn't put in an appearance unless you like. It was their own proposal; and I'm under obligations to Johnny Russell—I did not like to refuse——'

'But,' she said quickly, 'couldn't I get some dinner for them? I think I could manage.'

'Oh no,' he said impatiently. 'We shall dine at Epsom. And you needn't be afraid—Raby won't be one of them.'

'Shouldn't I have some supper for them, Fred?' she asked.

'No, no; it's drink they'll want; see that there's plenty of soda-water.'

Sabina said nothing more; but all the same she busied herself during the day in preparing for them a neat little supper, so that they might have it if they wished it; and long before they arrived it was all ready for them—a couple of cold fowls and some ham and salad, with bottled stout, and whisky and soda-water in the cupboard: there was no wine in the house. And she had a fire burning brightly; and there were clusters of wild flowers adorning the white table-cover; altogether this little apartment looked very neat and comfortable.

It was about nine o'clock when they arrived; she heard the noisy crew drive up to the gate. And then, amidst the tumult of their getting down, she could make out her husband's voice—and sulky enough it sounded.

'Hold your row, can't you? Do you want to make it out you're all drunk?'

'Keep your hair on, old man!' another said.

'You always were a bad loser, Freddie,' said a third; 'but I must say your luck to-day was awful, all the way through.'

And then as they got to the door one said, 'What is it to be? Crowns and pounds?'

But when they came inside a hush fell over them; and they left their coats and hats in the passage quietly enough; and then, during their brief and rough-and-ready introduction to Sabina, their manner was most demure. Johnny Russell was the only one of them she knew; and he was quite deferential.

'Come along, now, into the other room,' Foster said; 'if I'm dead broke, I mean to have a drink anyway.'

'Won't you smoke here?' Sabina suggested. 'Later on you may want a little supper.'

'Oh no, we don't want any supper,' he said. 'Come along, you fellows.'

Being thus imperatively bidden, they followed him into the passage; the next moment the open door showed them the supper already laid on the table.

'Here, what's the use of this?' he said, turning to Sabina. 'I told you we shouldn't want any supper. Send the girl, and have the table cleared.'

'Oh, I say, Foster,' Johnny Russell at once protested, 'that is rather cool. If Mrs. Foster has been so kind as to mean this for us—well, I think you might give us the chance; what do you say?

He turned to the others.

'Yes, yes, certainly,' was the unanimous answer; but whether that was prompted by any wish for supper or as a compliment to their hostess may be a matter of doubt.

'Oh, very well—very well,' Foster said, and he went into the room.

Sabina remained for a second uncertain; whereupon Johnny Russell facetiously remarked, 'I think we shall be surer of our welcome when Mrs. Foster takes her place at the table.'

Sabina needed no further invitation; and when she sat down they were very kind and attentive to her; though she had to remind them that it was she who ought to wait upon them. And if, as is highly probable, they wanted no supper at all, still, out of courtesy, they pretended to be valiant trencher-men, and Sabina was highly pleased. Fred Foster was the only one who did not join in; perhaps it was his losses during the day that made him moody; at all events, he remained standing by the fire; and he had lit a cigar.

Supper over, and things cleared away by the little maid-servant, Sabina withdrew; and she knew, by the hilarity that speedily followed, that she had done right in leaving them free. This was not whist they were playing, she guessed; probably it was some round game, in which the

ill-luck of the unfortunate was greeted with derision; anyhow, the noise did not disturb her; she read contentedly in the small drawing-room until (following an old habit about which Janie used to tease her) she quietly fell asleep. It was near midnight when she awoke; they were still playing, but less noisily; so leaving them to themselves, she slipped upstairs and went to bed.

But whatever game that was they had been playing, Fred Foster had burned his fingers at it, as she discovered next morning.

'Those brutes didn't go till three,' he said. 'I hope their walk back to Epsom did them good. I know they managed to clean me out before they left.'

And then he said, 'Look here, Sabie, I've been pretty hard hit lately, in several ways. I think I must sell the cob and the pony-chaise.'

'To pay Mr. Deane?' she asked.

'Oh no. He's all right. He has got a bill for that. But I must get a bit of money somehow. And this would save old Noel's wages, and the keep of the cob besides.'

'Very well,' she said, without any word of remonstrance or regret.

But this sale of the cob and the pony-chaise—they were taken away a couple of days thereafter—left her life at the cottage even more monotonous and empty than it had been before. She worked a little in the garden; she read sometimes; she wrote to Janie, or to Mrs. Foster in Buckinghamshire, evading the old lady's pertinacious inquiries about the whereabouts and conduct of her son. But it was a lonely life; the hours went by slowly; there were long spaces for reverie, and recollections, and forecasts, which were not always of the happiest kind. But no word of complaint escaped her; whatever of despair was in her heart she kept concealed there; she sought for no sympathy. Sometimes, in a half-hysterical kind of way, she would convince herself that her father would relent, and that a larger income would remove her husband's discontent and win him back to her; and she would go downstairs in the morning with some wild hope of finding a letter there with the joyful news. No such letter came. Sir Anthony's com-

munications were punctual; beyond that, nothing. And so the slow days went by, each one laying a heavier hand upon her heart.

She did not go to the Private View of the Grosvenor, nor yet to Janie Wygram's wedding; but thereafter she got many and many a letter from Janie, describing their wanderings in Italy, and her joy over these new experiences. The young married couple were not away very long, though they managed to visit a good many places in the time; and Sabina began to count the days until their return, for somehow she wished to know that Janie was in London.

It was the second morning after they got back that Janie received the following note:—

'DEAR FRIEND—Do you remember one night at Mrs. Mellord's a Scotch girl singing a song that began something like this—

O can ye sew cushions,
And can ye sew sheets,
And can ye sing ballaloo
When the bairn greets?

Do you think you could get me a copy of it? You will try, for Sabie's sake.'

Just as fast as ever she could walk from Nottinghill to Kensington Square, Janie carried this note; and breathless and joyful she was when she put it into her mother's hand.

'See, mother,' she cried. 'Don't you understand?—it is a message! And oh, I am so glad! Poor Sabie—she will not be so lonely now.'

CHAPTER XXVII

IN NEW YORK

WALTER LINDSAY never even began the series of drawings of the River Shannon, the chief aim of which was that they should form a little exhibition by themselves, and so enable him to invite Sabina to the Private View. But after he had been a little while in America, the idea recurred to him of getting together a collection of consecutive studies of one particular neighbourhood; and finally he betook himself to the Adirondacks, remaining there all the winter and most of the spring, suffering a good deal of hardship at times, but working diligently nevertheless. When he returned to New York he brought with him a sufficient number of sketches and pictures to make a very creditable show in a room that he hired for the purpose; and if there was no formal Private View, many visitors dropped in in a casual kind of way; and the newspapers were kind enough to approve. The end of it was that a railway-king bought the entire collection—to be set into a series of panels in his smoking-room; thus leaving Lindsay free to renew his solitary wanderings.

But on the afternoon that saw this transaction completed, he thought he would treat himself to a bit of a frolic later on; and so, being president of a small society going by the name of the Monks of St. Giles (he had borrowed the title of a club to which he had been introduced in Edinburgh), he issued a summons to the members to meet that night at twelve; and then he went to order supper for them at the hotel where they were wont to assemble. From thence he strolled along to a certain large theatre, where they were

just then playing 'Romeo and Juliet'; passed in by the stage entrance; made his way through many intricate passages; and finally gained admission to a room in which Romeo and Tybalt—in perfect amity—were dressing for their respective parts.

'The Monks meet to-night; I thought I would make sure of you,' he said to Romeo.

'All right,' the hapless lover answered (for a wonder he was a perfectly ideal Romeo—young, slim, well-featured, well-mannered).

And then he turned to Tybalt—who, by the way, was as handsome as any Montague of them all.

'I say, Jack, you know we are not supposed to take any one with us, but I'll make it all right with the boys. Will you go as my guest? I'll lend you a cloak and hood.'

'I should like it immensely,' was the immediate answer.

'One good turn deserves another,' Romeo said, with a laugh. 'Jack, why don't you go and get a domino and mask, and we'll get Lindsay on in the ballroom scene?'

'What, on the stage?' cried the victim of this proposal.

'Why, of course! It will be quite a new experience for you. You're not afraid, are you? Even if you should be, that will be another experience. Stage-fright is a delicious thing—when it is over, and you begin to breathe again. Besides, no one will see you, if you keep your mask up.'

'But what am I to do?'

'Oh, anything you like. You can stand and talk to Lady Capulet. Or you may fan the nurse. Or walk about among the crowd. But you'd better not wander down the stage much; you might get in the way—and those Capulets are pretty quick with their weapons.'

'You may trust me not to wander one inch from the place I'm put in,' observed Walter Lindsay, with marked decision.

'You'll come off with the others of course,' his friend continued carelessly (indeed he was more intent on pencilling his eyebrows). 'And if you care to stay and see the rest of the play, you can sit in the first entrance; then we could all go down together to the Monks.'

Well, it was not only a new experience, it was an absolutely bewildering one. For no sooner had he donned the long blue domino, with its belt and dagger, and taken the scarlet mask in his hand, than he was led on the stage and placed by the side of Lady Capulet's chair of state; and then it seemed to him as if he were lost in ungovernable chaos. How was this turbulent, amorphous crowd, with its picturesque costumes and visors and weapons, ever to fall into the regulated harmony of a ballroom? The air was thick with warnings, calls, and cries; his efforts to converse with the Lady Capulet were of the most inconsequent kind. But presently there was a sound slow and melodious; a hush fell over the varied throng; and as the raising of the curtain revealed to him a vast space beyond this ballroom in which he stood—a space dusky and dim and huge, and filled with orange-hued masses of what were apparently human beings—he found that these figures near him were gliding through the gentle movements of a minuet, while a chorus of voices somewhere kept time with the strains of the music. Curiously enough, he was not concerned about the audience in the least. To him they were nonexistent. They were eyeless, as it were. Why should he heed those distant and dusky rows of inanimate objects that he could scarce make out? It was here, in this actual and living throng, that all his interests were; and it was strange to be one of them—to be in the midst of them—not the remote spectator of a theatrical display—but standing amongst the guests in the glare and gorgeousness of a ballroom in a house in Verona. The whole thing became marvellously and unaccountably real. There was the Lady Juliet. Well, he had the honour of a slight acquaintance with the young lady who was then playing the part, having met her in one or two social circles in New York; but now he forgot all about that; surely this was the real Juliet in her father's home, observed of all, and charming all with her youthful and radiant beauty, her dignity, her gentle courtesy. A few minutes before he had been up in his friend's dressing-room, chatting to him, watching the buckling on of his rapier, and thinking mostly about the Monks of St. Giles; but he forgot all about that too; surely this was the real Romeo—

the love-lorn, ill-fated youth—here in this ballroom—in Verona—whose vibrant voice now thrilled through the half-silenced music—

> *'Oh she doth teach the torches to burn bright!*
> *Her beauty hangs upon the cheeks of night*
> *Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;*
> *Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!'*

But this was only the beginning of his bewilderment; for by and by, when the minuet was over, the Lady Juliet was free to move among her father's bidden guests, bestowing here and there a gracious word or smile; and to his amazement he found she was approaching him.

'Good evening, Mr. Lindsay,' she said. 'Oh, you need not be afraid. No one can recognise you. Jack told me who you were.'

'But I *am* afraid—horribly afraid,' he said.

'Of what?'

'Of getting in the way, or doing something wrong——'

'No, no,' she said; and then she added with a touch of gentle malice, 'Won't you walk down the stage with me? Will you give me your arm?'

'Oh no, thank you, I'd rather not,' was the instant and anxious answer. 'I feel safe where I am, thank you very much.'

And surely this was the strangest and most dazing and puzzling scene that any human being ever found himself in, whether in Verona or New York, or anywhere else? Here is what his distracted ears were listening to—including his own voice; while his eyes would keep wandering from the Lady Juliet to her watchful cousin and her more magnanimous father—

Tybalt—Now, by the stock and honour of my kin, To strike him dead I hold it not a sin.

Capulet—Why, how now, kinsman, wherefore storm you so?

Tybalt—Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe, A villain that is hither come in spite, To scorn at our solemnity this night.

The Lady Juliet—Surely, Mr. Lindsay, you do not think that any one can recognise you?

Walter Lindsay—Not hitherto; but now all their opera-glasses are levelled at you; and supposing I were to drop my mask by accident, what then?

Tybalt—It fits, when such a villain is a guest. I'll not endure him!

Capulet—He shall be endured! What, goodman boy! I say he shall. Go to!

The Lady Juliet—I hear you are going to take Jack to some club to-night. Don't let him sit up too late.

Walter Lindsay—Oh, I will look after him. But he doesn't need looking after. Your brother Jack is a very good boy.

Tybalt—Why, uncle, 'tis a shame!

Capulet—Go to! Go to!

The Lady Juliet—Well, I will say good-night now, Mr. Lindsay, for I shan't see you again this evening. I don't like seeing people after playing *Juliet*. Good-night!

Walter Lindsay (remembering his part, and bowing gravely)—Addio, signorina.

On the whole, however, he was more content when the slow procession filed off the stage; and when they found for him a corner from which he could look on at the ever-beautiful balcony scene. And even here, standing in the 'wings,' amongst gasmen and carpenters and scene-shifters, it was still that magic night in Verona that was all around him; and it was not the young lady he had met in New York society that he saw before him; but Juliet her very self, in all her impassioned tenderness, now startled and coy and timid, now generously confiding and bountiful in her love, and in her maiden charms

More beautiful than whom Alcæus wooed,
The Lesbian woman of immortal song!

Nay, so much was he impressed with the reality of the scene, that when Romeo, having uttered his last farewell, came out of that moonlit garden, Lindsay, from some kind of delicacy, let him go by without speaking, and did not follow him to his dressing-room. On the contrary, he

merely sent him a message to say that he did not wish to stay the performance out, but would come back for those two when it was over; and then he wandered forth into the busy streets of New York. To tell the truth, he rather wanted to make this a frolicsome night; and even a winter in the Adirondacks had not wholly hardened up the sensitiveness of his artist's temperament; very well he knew that the tragic spectacle of Juliet's unnumbered woes was not the best beginning for a merry evening.

And indeed, as it turned out, this midnight meeting of the Monks proved to be a very gay affair, when each had donned his cloak and hood of sober gray, and taken his place at the sumptuously-furnished table. At first there was no kind of order in the proceedings; the business of supper had to be got through with; quips and jests and anecdotes of more or less doubtful veracity were bandied about anyhow; and, as the wine flowed, there was abundant laughter found for even a fish story. But when the supper things had been removed, and cigars lit, the president from time to time tinkled his bell for silence; and in the pauses those who were able and willing joined in this or that old English glee—'Dame Durden,' 'Calm be thy Slumbers,' 'Ye Spotted Snakes,' 'Here in Cool Grot,' and so forth. Likewise there were many plantation choruses; one especially being a favourite; for as each Monk had to improvise a verse—no matter what—there was abundant occasion for all kinds of personalities, the sting of which, of course, disappeared, or was drowned rather, in the universal chorus of 'Balm of Gilead, Gilead!' It was a very careless and merry gathering; but the climax of these festivities was neither careless nor merry. At a quarter to two the lights were lowered. Each Monk drew forward his cowl and sat with downcast head. And then, in the hushed silence, a powerful baritone began to sing—slowly and with clear enunciation—that grimmest and weirdest of all the Scotch ballads, 'The Twa Corbies,' while after each couplet the whole of the company took up the fantastic and mournful refrain. It was the old air, which is curiously pathetic in its simplicity, that was sung; and scarcely less gruesome than the words themselves—

'And nae ane kens that he lies there
But his hawk and his hound and his lady fair,'

was the slow-chanted burden that followed—

'With a fal, lal lal, lal lal, lal lay
With a fal, lal lal, lal lay.'

And then, when the tragic story was ended—

'Mony's the ane for him makes mane,
But nane shall ken where he is gane;
Owre his white banes, when they are bare,
The wind shall blaw for evermair.'

And when the last deep-sounding, mournful notes,

'With a fal, lal lal, lal lal, lal lay,
With a fal, lal lal, lal lay,'

had died into silence, they rose from the table; the lights were turned up; cloaks and hoods put aside; and—somewhat sobered by this mystic rite—the Monks were free to go their several ways home.

Walter Lindsay, however, had rooms in this same hotel; and so, when the last of his friends had gone, he retired thither, drew in a chair to the fire, that was still burning, and took from his pocket a letter. It had come that morning; it was from Janie; and although there was a good deal in it about her husband and their travels in Italy, the bulk of it (as of yore) was all about Sabina; and this was what he wanted to read over again, in seclusion and peace.

'Sometimes we were amused, sometimes we were a little ashamed of ourselves,' the ever-faithful Janie wrote, 'to find how often the same idea was in our head in going through those picture-galleries. When we went into a new room we almost invariably made first for the most prominent Madonna subject. Philip would stand looking at it for some time. "Very curious; none of them quite seem to have her expression. There's something about those eyebrows a little like." Then I (in sweet simplicity): "But who is it you are thinking of, Phil?" "Oh, you know well enough. As if your beloved Sabie was ever for a moment out of your head! And of course I've got to think of her

sometimes—so as not to feel lonely; you can't always be wandering away by yourself." But really it was he who began it, even before we were married, for he took me to the National Gallery, and we went over all the Madonnas carefully, but not one would do. This one was too cold and wooden; the other simpering, and so forth. Nor did we get on any better abroad. There's one in the Louvre, the *Vierge aux rochers*, that has something of the calm look of Sabie's forehead, but her hair is more *crimpled* than Sabie's; and then you remember there is always a little trickiness in the smile of that woman that Leonardo used to paint. The most beautiful one we saw, "The Assumption," in Venice—yes, that was very beautiful—but it was quite different from Sabie. She is so much more human, to my fancy; and looks at you so straight. But if we failed before, you may imagine whether we are likely to succeed now. Phil and I went down the other day. Dear friend, I wish you could see her, if but for a moment. There is a look in her face that was never there before, even in the old days when she was at her happiest. I think she had quite given herself over to despair—though she would never complain—and I never wrote much to you about it, for I had not the heart to do so; but now that she finds there is some consolation for her, and some call for her love and sympathy, and a constant interest in her lonely life, she seems overcome with a kind of wondering gratitude. If you could only see her stooping over the little bed where the child lies, and see the happiness in her face, and her delight in showing you all the little bits of finery and lace that she has made with her own fingers, you would understand how deeply, deeply thankful we all are that something has happened to make her life a little more bearable. Poor Sabie! Who could ever have thought that this would be the end—living almost alone in a cottage away from all her friends. But in spite of all her shrewdness and high spirits, she was always romantically generous; it was invariably "Give, give" with her; and so to make up for a trumpery accident, she gave herself! That's what I call it: and many a time my heart was very sore about it, when I saw the result, though I did not tell

you everything; but now I am glad to write and say that she is a little happier. She laughed once or twice the last time we were there—it's such a long time since I heard our poor Sabie laugh. When baby gets a little older, Phil is going to ask a friend of his who is a very skilled photographer to go down and take a group of mother and child; and if it turns out well, be sure you will have a copy if you care to have it; and as for me, I know I shall far and away prefer it to any of the Madonnas we saw abroad.

'We keep the house and studio as neat and pretty as we can, and occasionally have a few friends; and often enough, when I see them seated at the table, I think of the night that Sabie came to your supper party, and looked so pretty as she sat next to you. I wonder if you remember the Indian silk dress, and the *fichu* of yellow lace, and the forget-me-nots! Poor Sabie, there are no more of such nights for her now.'

That was all that Janie had to report at present. And if it never occurred to her that she was doing a remarkably ingenuous thing in writing out to Walter Lindsay to inform him that Mr. Fred Foster had been presented with a son—well, that did not occur to Lindsay either. It was as Sabie's child that both of them regarded this newcomer; Janie rejoiced to see that at last some measure of happiness had been meted out to one whose life had of late been loveless enough; Lindsay wondering in a vague sort of way whether Sabina had ever heard of the pet name that the Highland mother has for her infant—'the lamb of my heart.' But his thoughts and fancies went far further afield. During those solitary months in the Adirondacks he had been a good deal given to looking into the future, with no kind of despair or discontent whatever, but rather with a curious apathy. The long, forthcoming years looked empty somehow, and not very interesting: that was all. But with this letter of Janie's lying on his knee—and as he sat far into the morning, with the fire in the grate slowly dwindling down—other pictures began to form themselves. Strangely enough, neither Fred Foster nor Sabina was there; he had forgotten them, he did not see them. But he saw a young lad, tall for his age, and fair, with clear brown eyes, and a

bright and gracious smile; and he saw himself, grave and grizzled and elderly, and yet half-admiring the lad's audacity and foolish opinions, walking by his side. This was in Galloway. They had fishing-rods in their hands. And if the tall, proud-featured, but gentle-lipped youth had been talking wilful perversity in politics, now he was all meek submission as his elderly companion began to select flies for him, and show him where were the likely casts in the stream. And not in Galloway alone (though the boy would know that he was heir to a little estate in that county). Might not Mentor and Telemachus—always with their rods and fly-books accompanying them—enjoy many devious and distant wanderings, with lunch on the loch-side or the river-bank, and evenings before the fire in the cosy room of the inn?

'Nay, spring I'd meet by Tweed or Ail,
And summer by Loch Assynt's deep,
And autumn in that lonely vale
Where wedded Avons westward sweep.

Or where, amid the empty fields,
Among the bracken of the glen,
Her yellow wreath October yields
To crown the crystal brows of Ken.'

The elder of these two inseparable companions—whom he saw in those visionary pictures—was himself. And the other? Well, the lad had Sabina's eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN AMBASSADOR

MR. FRED FOSTER was going down home by the ten o'clock train from Waterloo; and he had for companion a big, heavy, red-faced, good-natured-looking man, who seemed in much better spirits than his neighbour.

'No, no, Freddy, take my advice, and never back yourself at billiards unless you're ahead, and in fairly good luck. You can't play a losing game a bit; and bad luck drives you wild. Why, man, you can't ram the balls into the pockets if they won't go. Temper won't do it, my lad.'

'And I suppose you wouldn't get out of temper if you were playing with a cad like that?' was the retort. 'I never saw such a sneak in all my life. His sole notion of the game was to pot the white and get double baulk.'

'When a man thinks he's going to land a tidy little twenty-five pounds, he doesn't play to the gallery,' observed Mr. John Scott, sententiously. 'Well, well, old chap, cheer up. It will be a lesson to you. You know you were just a little bit too eager to touch that young man's chinks. A pony to a fiver, and thirty-five points in two hundred, that's not good biz. That's not billiard-betting at all unless you were to bar flukes. In a nomination game it might do; but with all the chances of luck against you, I'd be awful sure of my play before I backed myself at five to one.'

'The sneak wouldn't bet at all without ridiculous odds —that's what it was,' Foster said, rather morosely. 'And if he had played a fair game, I should have won easily. Why, I'd lay him £100 to £10 to-morrow, and give him 200 in 1000—to-morrow morning I'd do it!'

'Yes,' said the other, drily, 'but I think he has had enough. I think he will be quite content when he has got that twenty-five pounds in his trousers' pocket.'

'He hasn't got it there yet, then,' Foster said gloomily, 'and I don't see how he is to get it just at present. My luck for the last four months has just been awful. It was the scratching of Theology for the Liverpool Cup that began it—the most infernal swindle ever done on the turf that was—I am certain of it—a deliberate swindle; well, ever since that, every mortal thing has gone against me—every mortal thing. I seem to Jonah everything I touch.'

'Take my advice and keep your noddle cool, then,' Mr. Scott said pleasantly. 'I know you, Fred, my lad. When they get you in a corner, you are inclined to put down your head and butt. But that's not the way to play the great game. No, no, keep cool; and bide your chance.'

'There's an awful amount of advice about this evening,' Foster was goaded into saying. 'Very kind of you, I am sure, Mr. Scott. Perhaps you wouldn't mind also lending me a pony for a week or two, to settle up with that sneak?'

The suggestion was merely a bit of sarcasm, but Mr. Scott took it blandly enough.

'My dear boy,' he said, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, 'didn't I tell you what they did to me at Shrewsbury? If King of Tralee hadn't pulled off the Shropshire Handicap I should have had to come home on shanks' mare.'

Mr. Scott left the train at Epsom; Foster went on to Witstead. At the little station only one other passenger got out—a gentleman of the neighbourhood, who jauntily stepped into his lamp-lit brougham, and was rapidly driven away, leaving his fellow-traveller to find his way home on foot. The night was pitch dark; the air thick, with a cold raw drizzle; the roads heavy with mire; and as Fred Foster had to exercise the utmost caution to prevent his stumbling into the ditch, his reflections were none of the most genial kind.

'Sir Anthony Zembra at the Mansion House—great oration—generous appeal—cheque for five hundred guineas—cheers. Sir Anthony Zembra entertains Prime Minister

at Waldegrave Club—proceedings strictly private. 'Sir Anthony Zembra arrived at the Castle, and had the honour of dining, etc. Yes; and Sir Anthony Zembra's son-in-law finds himself slouching along a muddy country lane, like a tramp in search of a night's lodging, with precious little prospect of supper before him.'

Nor were his meditations much enlivened by the appearance of Wayside Cottage when eventually he arrived there. All the lower windows were dark. In one of the upper windows there was the faintest yellow tinge; probably a night-light was burning in the room. So he knocked and rang, knocked and rang, until a sharper light appeared there; and then he waited; and by and by Sabina herself, wrapped from head to foot in a large shawl, and bearing a candle in her hand, opened the door for him.

'What is the use of going to bed in the middle of the day?' he asked surlily, as he entered.

'It is past eleven,' was the mild answer; 'but I would have waited up any time if I had known you were coming.'

'Fire out, I suppose,' he said, as he preceded her into the little dining-room.

Unmistakably it was out.

She lit the two lamps on the sideboard; and said she was sorry she had not known he was coming; but would she get him some supper? She could easily do that without waking the girl.

'Has that cheque come down to-day?' he asked.

'No; it is only due to-day; I suppose it will come to-morrow,' she answered; and then she added rather piteously, 'But, Fred, surely you do not want any of that money!'

For she owed some small sums in Epsom. But that was not all. The baby was now old enough to be promoted from a cradle to a cot; and she had seen a very neat-looking one in Epsom; and she had looked forward to the patient adornment of it by her own hands as a welcome labour of love in the slow hours. Nay, she had even procured the materials for the purpose; and had foreshadowed the most cunning little elegancies; and had designed, in old English letters, a scroll to hang at the head of it—

Gute Nacht, du süsses Kind,
Mögen Engel dich behüten,
Und der Schlummer leis und lind,
Streue dir die schönsten Blüthen.

And she had promised herself the happiness of purchasing this cot as soon as the cheque from her father arrived; it was an extravagance, she knew; but she had set her heart on it.

'Why, of course I want some of it!' he said sharply. 'I wish you knew the straits I am in. I suppose you wouldn't mind if I were locked up in Holloway Gaol?'

'Oh, Fred, don't talk that way,' she entreated. 'Don't let us quarrel about nothing. See, there is a letter on the mantelpiece—from Buckinghamshire—there is bad news—your mother is not well.'

This brought him to his senses in an instant.

'It came four days ago,' she said, as he went to the fireplace.

'Then why didn't you send it to me?'

'You know I hadn't your address,' she said—but by this time he was wholly engrossed with the contents of the letter.

It was written by old Mr. Foster; and the animus of the old gentleman against his son was clearly shown by the fact that the latter was not mentioned or referred to in any way whatsoever. It was all a prayer that Sabina and her child should go and live with the old people, who would do everything in their power to make her comfortable. This entreaty was sent at the earnest request of Mrs. Foster, who could not herself write just then, as she was ill and in bed. The long-continued cold and wet had affected her general health; a bad cough had supervened on that; and it was feared her lungs were more or less affected. Still, no immediate alarm was felt; only the old lady seemed anxiously to wish to know that her daughter was near her, as she said; and she sent many and many kindly messages. Finally, would Sabina at once send a telegram in reply? It would give Mrs. Foster great pleasure to hear that she was coming; and they would begin to make preparations to receive her.

'Of course, it's impossible,' Fred Foster rather impatiently said. 'I'm not going to live down there—unless the writters make it too hot for me to live anywhere else.'

And then he said more gently, 'I *should* like to run down and see how the Mater is, if it wasn't for the expense.'

'Oh, Fred,' Sabina said, 'why should that hinder you? The money will be here to-morrow—by the mid-day post at latest. Of course you must go and see your mother.'

'No,' he said, somewhat sulkily. 'No, I don't want any of that money. I can do without it. You keep it.'

'But really I can do without the whole of it,' Sabina said—for she was a generous-hearted kind of creature. 'Really I can. I have a few bills to pay; and then I thought of buying baby a cot——'

'Why? Isn't the cradle good enough?' he said, turning to her.

'They say a cot is healthier. But baby can wait,' Sabina said cheerfully. 'There's not much the matter with his health, the dear.'

'Well, go to your bed now. I'm going to smoke a pipe—and consider the best way of keeping out of gaol.'

So Sabina went away, sincerely hoping that he would go down to Missenden on the morrow; for he was always more considerate to her, and more reasonable, and a little less selfish, when he had been even for the briefest space under his mother's roof.

But the next morning his mood had changed—as frequently happened with him.

'The old man has been pitching it strong about the Mater's health,' he said, 'in order to get you to promise to go down. Oh, I know his games. He has done that before with me. I should like to hear more definite news before going away down there, and spending money on a wild-goose chase. By the way, I think I shall have to ask you for a fiver out of that cheque if it comes to-day.'

'Very well, Fred.' And then she said, 'Just look at baby; I think he's going to be an artist. It is quite extraordinary the fascination that anything with colours on it has for him. From the very first he wouldn't look at the silver mug that Janie gave him; but that one is his favourite plaything. Fancy Mr. Lindsay taking all the trouble to have that made in America and sent over.'

'If you had any common sense, you would lock it away

in a drawer,' he said briefly. 'A pretty catch for a thief, that, with all those stones.'

The cheque did not come by the first post, so he had to kick his heels about the house, waiting for the second. On one occasion, when Sabina came into the room, she found him reading over again the letter she had shown him the previous night. He threw it on to the table contemptuously.

'It's pretty clever,' he said.

'What is?'

'The proposal that you should go down and live at Missenden. Very ingenious that is; quite worthy of the old boy.'

'But I don't understand, Fred.'

'They get you down there; and expect me to go too. Either I do or I don't. If I don't—as I certainly shouldn't—he cuts off my allowance; that's what he's after; and there's so much saved. But if I were to go, then we should only cost them what we ate and drank in the house—cheap, you know'

'Oh, Fred, why should you look at it like that!' Sabina protested. 'Isn't it natural they should wish us to go and live with them—especially if your mother is not well, and perhaps a little anxious and fretting? Anyway, what am I to telegraph?'

'What is the use of telegraphing?' he said. 'Write and say it is impossible.'

However, neither letter nor telegram was necessary. Scarcely had Sabina left the room when Fred Foster heard some one at the little gate outside, and, turning, saw to his quick alarm that it was his father. Instantly he went to the door and opened it.

'How is mother?' he asked breathlessly.

The old gentleman, at least, was in no hurry. He even seemed unwilling to speak to his son.

'She is just about the same,' he said, coldly, as he passed into the hall. 'I suppose Sabina is at home.'

'Yes, I'll fetch her.'

The old man went into the dining-room, put his umbrella in a corner, and his wideawake on the table, but he kept

on his Inverness cape when he sat down. He was looking around him with no very amiable expression; perhaps he had not expected to find his son at home. However, his face brightened a little when Sabina came into the room; and he gave her some more definite particulars about Mrs. Foster's condition.

'You got my letter?' he asked.

'Oh yes, but I could not telegraph until Fred came home.'

'Oh, he has been away—that was it,' the old man said. 'I thought it strange. And—and as I had some business with my lawyers in London, it occurred to me that I might as well run down and take back the answer myself.'

It was a pretty lame excuse for this sudden and unannounced visit, the real object of which was obvious enough.

'Well, and how long does your husband propose to continue this folly?' he asked, looking round the room.

'If you mean living in this house,' said Fred Foster, with a levity which was dangerously ill-timed, 'I assure you I couldn't get a cheaper one anywhere, for I haven't paid a farthing for it.'

'Then you owe money for it—that you expect me to pay?' the old man said, turning sharply to his son; and Sabina, fearing what might ensue, thought she could not do better than fly away quickly and get baby made presentable and bring him down to act as peacemaker.

Indeed, she had not been many minutes in the room, her fingers as busy as ever they could with the adornment of her precious charge, when she could hear pretty plainly that there was a battle-royal raging below. Now there was no gentle-eyed mother to interpose between these two; and it was clear from the beginning that the old man had come down in a suspicious and resentful mood against his son. Moreover, she guessed that the father must have thrown out some unusually bitter taunts, for it was not customary with Fred Foster to get angry. He was too selfish and indifferent for that. He could sulk, but ordinarily he would not take the trouble to storm. And when at last she was enabled to hurry downstairs—the voices ceased as she opened the door—it was clear that Fred Foster no longer

wore any mask of levity; he was standing with his back to the window, but even with his face in shadow, her swift glance told her he was scowling, angry, and tight-lipped.

She drew in a chair close to the old man, so that the wonderful baby might be properly admired.

'Isn't he growing a big boy?' she said proudly.

'I have a little present for him from his grandmother,' Mr. Foster said, and he took out from his purse a carefully-folded £10 bank-note. 'This is to go into the Post-Office Savings Bank in his own name, she says, and you are to add a little when you can; and then when he grows up a bit he will be able to buy himself a pony.'

Of course Sabina thanked the old gentleman; and made believe that baby understood all that was being arranged for him, and was, indeed, quite an interested party.

'Do you remember, perhaps,' Mr. Foster continued—and he looked at his daughter-in-law with a little hesitation—'the corner room at the end of the passage—overlooking the greenhouses?'

'Oh yes, perfectly,' she answered.

'We were thinking—my wife was thinking—that might do for a nursery—if you were coming to live with us.'

'Yes?' Sabina said: what more could she say?

The old man paused for a second or two.

'What answer am I to take back?' he asked. 'May I say that we are to expect you?'

Sabina involuntarily turned to her husband.

'Oh, you may do as you like,' Fred Foster said curtly. 'I'm not going to live in Missenden. I can't afford it.'

'You can't afford it—but you can afford to keep up this separate house!' the old man retorted; but he would say no more; Sabina was there.

He turned to her.

'What do you say, my dear?' he asked very gently.

'I am sure Fred would like to go and see his mother—will you tell her that he will come and see her?' Sabina said timidly.

'But that is not it,' the old man said plainly. 'Surely you must understand that it is for your own sake as much as for ours that we want to see you settled down into a

quiet, respectable life. We offer you a home. We will do our best to make you comfortable. If the ways of the house don't suit you, we will alter them. I don't think you will find us unkind or inconsiderate. I daresay my wife would say more to you, but you see she is ill, and cannot come to ask you herself; and what I have said is perhaps badly said—only I would rather see my daughter-in-law in a settled home than moving from place to place in furnished lodgings.'

It was a cruel position for her to be placed in; for the offer was meant in all kindness; but she did not hesitate.

'You have heard what Fred said, sir,' she answered calmly. 'And of course I must remain with my husband.'

'That is your final decision?'

Her eyes were bent to the ground; and it was in rather a low voice—for she knew to what she was condemning herself—that she said, 'Yes.'

He rose then.

'But don't go yet,' she pleaded. 'Won't you stay and have some lunch with us?'

'No, thank you; I must try and get back to Missenden to-night.'

As he was leaving the room—he did not even bid good-bye to his son—he said to Sabina, 'Come here, I want to speak with you.'

She followed him into the passage, where he opened the door for himself.

'Mind, child, I have no quarrel with you,' he said, in a very different voice from that he had used in the room. 'Whatever we can do for your good, we will do. It was that that brought me here to-day.'

'But don't quarrel with Fred, either,' she pleaded earnestly. 'Indeed, he speaks the truth. He has been so used to an active life—here and there—that it is hardly a wonder he shrinks from tying himself down to Missenden all at once. Perhaps he might get more familiar with the idea by and by. Or he might try it for a time. But don't part with him in anger.'

'I have nothing further to say on that head,' the old man said somewhat coldly. 'Except this, that I don't

choose to support him any longer in idleness. I thought when he married there would be a change. There is no change—except for the worse, as far as I can see. My patience is out. From this day he will not touch a penny of my money—it is simply monstrous that in hard times like these, when farms are going a-begging, we should be supplying him with money for horse-racing and gambling. No, from this day, the allowance we have hitherto made him shall be paid—but into your hands, for the support of yourself and your household. That is settled. So good-bye, and God bless you, my child. I'll have a lot of questions to answer about the baby.'

Sabina, when she returned to the room, did not say anything about this decision on the part of the old gentleman, for she thought that it was perhaps merely a threat—the temporary result of impatience and anger. As for Fred Foster, he seemed to take his father's visit very coolly.

'Somebody has been telling him a pack of lies about me, that's what it is,' he said. 'And didn't I tell you he was pitching it strong about the Mater's illness?—of course, if she had been so very ill, he would not have come all the way here. And the story about his lawyers—very good! I know why he came down in that sudden fashion; it was to spy out the land. Wonder if he expected to find a wild carnival going on—fountains spouting champagne—and Nautch girls lolling about on marble steps. Doesn't look like it somehow.'

With the second post came the looked-for cheque; and when Sabina had signed it, he put it in his pocket, saying he would get it cashed in London, and send her down the balance after retaining the five pounds.

'Five pounds,' he said, as he leisurely put on his overcoat and brushed his hat; 'it isn't a large sum to set about the retrieving of your fortunes with. I daresay some fellows could work it out into £500 or £5000 before the end of the year, but that doesn't seem to be my line at present.'

'Are you going back to London already?' she asked—but with no reproach in her tone.

'I suppose one must try to do something,' he said carelessly: the cheque in his pocket was in some small degree comforting.

And then he said, 'Look here, you don't really mean to bury that ten-pound note in the savings bank? What nonsense that is! Our circumstances are not suggestive of opening bank accounts. What are you going to do with it?'.

'Fred,' she said, looking at him, 'you wouldn't touch *that?* It's from your mother. It's for baby.'

He pulled himself together.

'No, no; that's all right. Go and bury it in the savings' bank, if you like. Though the pony seems to me a long way off.'

By and by he left for the station, and Sabina was once more in solitary possession of the house. Yet not quite solitary either. She went up to her room; the baby was in its cradle and asleep. Perhaps the sound of her foot on the stairs, perhaps the opening of the door, had disturbed the child, but he moved a little as she crept forward on tiptoe; and presently she was kneeling down beside him, quieting him with velvet fingers, and crooning over him—but so gently that she could scarce hear her own voice—the song that Janie had got for her—

'O can ye sew cushions,
And can ye sew sheets,
And can ye sing ballaloo
When the bairn greets?
And hie and baw birdie,
And hie and baw lamb,
And hie and baw birdie,
My bonnie wee lamb.'

She liked this song—its old-fashioned words and pathetic air. But when she was hushing the child to sleep—or walking about with him in her arms—and even when she was at her loneliest, with her heart at times pretty heavy within her—she did not make the plaintive air too sad. For well she knew that it is not when the mother cries that the babe smiles.

CHAPTER XXIX

TOO LATE!

'I SUPPOSE you would like me to pawn my wife's wedding-ring?'

It was Fred Foster who spoke in this hurt way; and it was his friend Jim Deane whom he addressed. But all the usual good-humour was absent now from Mr. Deane's small, ferrety, clear eyes, and from the weather-pinched face, with its lined features and small neat whiskers. For there was no Sabina present to mollify his manner. Rather he seemed to be following his wife's brisk counsel of the year before—that he should no longer submit to Foster's superior airs; and indeed at this moment his expression was far from being placable. The two men were in a small apartment at the top of a house in Wellington Street, Strand, which now constituted Fred Foster's lodging when he had to stay in town of a night.

'Pawn it or sell it, that don't concern me,' was the retort. 'But what I want you to understand is that I am not going to go on renewing that bill every three months. Mind, I don't like the look of the transaction at all. I don't think it would sound well in court. You take over a horse and trap; give a bill for the amount; then you sell them; but instead of taking up the bill when it is due, it appears that you stuffed the money into your own pocket and spent it. Well, now, you know——'

'Oh, what's the use of talking like that!' Foster impatiently broke in. 'You would have had the money long ago if I hadn't struck such a cursed vein of ill-luck. Just look at Altcar last week. Did you ever see such luck?

Shrapnell breaking her leg, and Tricksy Kitty and The Lad coming to grief almost immediately after. How can you expect any one to be in funds?'

'And there is that house,' continued the other. 'You have been in it all this time, and not one penny of rent paid! Well, I can't afford to find people in furnished houses all for nothing.'

'You've come to town in a pretty temper, Jim,' Foster remarked coolly. 'Why, I took over the house and the things to oblige you—you wanted to be off to Newmarket in such a hurry.'

'To oblige me?' Mr. Deane repeated. 'Well, you'll oblige me by clearing out; that's all I've got to say. I'll forfeit the rent up till now, but I don't mean to be made a fool of any longer.'

'Why, man, do you think you could let the house at this time of the year?'

'That is my affair.'

'Come, be reasonable, Jim,' Foster said in more conciliatory tones. 'You know very well that I always meant to pay you, and mean it now. It isn't like you to be hard on a fellow who is down on his luck; and the luck I've experienced of late would melt the heart of a grindstone. Anybody deader broke than I am at the present moment I can't imagine. But it won't last—it can't last. Just give me till Sandown Grand Prize and then you'll see.'

Deane's small eyes brightened up a little.

'What are you on—Victory or Cherry-band?'

'Cherry-band.'

'Cherry-band is a very good horse,' he remarked slowly.

'I got on him at 8 to 1,' Foster said, with some cheerfulness.

'And what do you stand to win, if it's a fair question?' the other asked.

'Well, I put everything I could scrape together on him, every scrap; but you may suppose it wasn't millions. Why, that's been the worst of my luck; when I have pulled off a good thing there's been nothing on worth speaking of.'

'Cherry-band is a good horse over the sticks,' Deane said, contemplatively.

'We'll go across to the Gaiety bar,' said Foster, perceiving that Mr. Deane had grown more amenable, 'and drink his good health. It's Cherry-band has got to pull me through.'

When they were over the way, Foster, whose temperament could move from one extreme to another with remarkable facility, said to his companion, 'Look here, Jim, I'm so certain of this thing coming all right that I'll tell you what I'll do with you—here, now, at this very counter. If you are worrying about the rent of the house, I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll get paper and ink and write down to my wife, directing her to send you a certain sum every month out of the household money. You may depend it will be paid, for she's as methodical as clockwork; and so is her precious prig of a father, too, although I believe he would prefer to see us both starving. Now will that do? And how much is it to be?'

Mr. Deane looked somewhat uneasy.

'N—no, I don't think I will trouble Mrs. Foster,' he said, with some hesitation. 'Business is business, of course, but I prefer dealing with men.'

'Then you are content to wait to see what Wednesday does for me?'

'Y—yes.'

'Now,' Foster continued boldly, 'will you lend me a tenner to put on Cherry-band?'

'No, I will not,' Deane said, with much sharpness. 'Why, you're out of your senses!'

'It's always the way,' Foster said, plaintively, 'when I've got hold of a real good thing, a moral, it always happens just then that I am out of funds, and lose my chance.'

'And what if Cherry-band shouldn't pull it off?' his companion said, eyeing him.

Foster laughed in a curious kind of way.

'We'd better not speak about that.'

It was in the interval between this conversation and the Sandown Park Meeting that Fred Foster learned for the first time that henceforth his father meant to forward his quarterly allowance to Sabina; in fact, it was on one of his occasional visits to Wayside Cottage that the cheque

arrived, payable to her order. And he chose to be very angry about the circumstance, despite her remonstrances.

'What difference will it make?' she said. 'You will get the money all the same.'

'Why did you hide it from me all this time that he had spoken to you about it?' he asked, roughly enough.

'I—I did not hide it. I thought perhaps it was only a threat,' she said. 'Indeed I had no wish that he should do anything of the kind.'

'He thinks he can twist you round his finger. Wants you to go to Missenden! Oh yes. I wonder what he will try next. Anyhow, this cheque comes in handy enough, for I'm off to Sandown to-morrow—so you'd better sign it now.'

'But, Fred, you don't mean to take the whole of it away with you,' she pleaded.

'Oh, you needn't imagine I am going to risk all of it on horses,' he said. 'There's something more immediate than that. The Collinsons have a writ out against me—the contemptible cads!—and I must get it squared. That comes of doing people a kindness. I wonder how many people I have got to try their champagnes—without a farthing of commission. But every one's hand is turned against me just now. Here's Deane rowing about the rent of this house, when he ought to have been glad to have the place kept warm and dry through such a winter. Oh, I've had some nice experiences of late of human gratitude; I could write a book about it. As soon as you're down in your luck, then the truth comes out. If you can ask them to dinner, and give them the best of everything, then it's "My dear fellow" all over the place; or if they fancy you're on good terms with some of the trainers, they are ready to black your boots; but the moment your luck turns against you, then it's "Pay up, or you'll be in the County Court next week." Well, we'll see what Wednesday does. I hope it will be the turning-point. I've had ill-luck before, but never such a run; the time has come for a change surely.'

'It seems such a pity, Fred,' she ventured to say (for she was thinking of the small boy upstairs, and of many

little plans and schemes she had been drawing out on his behalf) 'that you should let everything hang on a mere chance.'

'Oh yes, I know,' he returned scornfully, 'that is what women always say. It's such a pity we're not all angels. Well, I never pretended to be one. Besides, the question doesn't interest me. What does interest me is whether Cherry-band is going to win the Grand Prize at Sandown on Wednesday—that interests me, a very great deal, I can tell you.'

He paused for a second or two, staring into the fire, and then he rose and went and filled a pipe.

'Oh, he must,' he said, half to himself, and indeed, as if he were inclined to laugh at himself. 'He must, he must, he must. Every man and lad in the stable has put his last farthing on him. He's ten pounds better than Cryddesho.'

She came to him with the cheque.

'Here it is, Fred, but don't be reckless.'

'I'm not reckless!' he said, turning upon her. 'I tell you, we simply can't live on the income we have at present, and when I try to make things a little better you say I'm reckless! You don't suppose any human being can have a constant run of good luck. I had a fair slice of it after we were married, and you didn't complain then. You must take the bad with the good, like other people; and it's no use, when things *are* bad, when one is trying one's best to pull through, I say it's pure nonsense to talk about recklessness.'

But that was neither his tone nor his manner when, early on the morning after the Sandown Grand Prize had been run for, he came back to Witstead. For the first time in their life together Sabina saw him thoroughly cowed; he was pale and agitated; and at the same time unusually reticent. No wonder she was alarmed.

'What is the matter, Fred?' she asked.

'Everything is the matter,' he answered, curtly.

He went upstairs to his dressing-room and got together a few things, which he brought down and proceeded to put hurriedly into his bag, and while doing so made her some brief explanation.

'I must get out of the way for a little while, that's all,' he said. 'I'm in a mess. I must clear out and get away until I see how things are to be squared.'

'Where are you going, Fred?' she asked calmly.

'You'd better not know. You can say you don't know. But, look here, whatever money you can send me—and you may imagine I shall have need of every penny—you can send to Captain Raby; he will know how to pass it on. He scribbled a few words on a piece of paper. 'That is his address. If you send post-office orders, make them payable to him, not to me.'

'Is—is everything gone, Fred?' she ventured to ask.

'Everything? I should think so. Everything!'

She went forward and put her hand on his arm.

'Fred, will you let this be the end now? I should not regret the loss of the money if only you would promise to have done with betting. Will you?'

He shook off her hand.

'Oh, don't talk. Cherry-band was drugged. I saw it the moment I clapped eyes on him. He was quite dazed and helpless when they pulled him out to run. Well, it has done for me. Even if the owner and trainer find out the scoundrel, that won't help me. What money have you in the house?'

The sudden question startled her. Clearly he was bent on immediate flight.

'A little over four pounds, I think,' she answered.

'Well, I must have it,' he said briefly.

'Fred!'

'Now don't make a fuss, but go and get it. Do you think this is a time for talking? I can tell you it's more serious than that.'

He had finished his packing by this time, and had gone to the sideboard for a piece of cake and a glass of spirits and water.

Sabina said nothing further, but went away upstairs, slowly and stealthily, for the child was lying asleep. On the landing, however, she paused irresolute. She could hear the girl she had left in charge hushing the baby, and, indeed, making some effort to imitate the cradle-

song that Sabina was used to croon. But it was not to listen she stood there; it was to bring her mind to this robbery of her child, as she considered it; and at last she gave way—she could not do it. She went down again to the room.

'No,' she said, with her face grown very pale, 'I will not do it, Fred; I cannot be so mean. It is not of myself I am thinking. If I were starving I would not complain; but it's the child—if he were taken ill—and nothing in the house——'

'Oh, if you won't get it, I must fetch it for myself, I suppose,' he said; and upstairs he went to the bedroom, where he found no difficulty in getting the money out of her desk. A few minutes thereafter he had gone from the house and was on his way to the station.

And so Sabina was once more left helpless and penniless and alone: and it is hardly to be wondered at that more than ever, if that was possible, she prized and treasured the one consolation of her solitary existence. The child became the very life of her life; the source of any glimmer of joy that shot athwart these darkened days; the one cheerful thing she could think of as regarded the future. She was angry and indignant with the little maidservant for not understanding what baby said—efforts at conversation which were mostly the creation of the mother's fancy; she wrote wonderful accounts to Janie of his exploits and qualities; when baby was pleased she was happy, and for the moment forgot everything else. Indeed it was oftentimes with a wondering gratitude that, amid all her dumb fears for the future, and her present anxieties and trouble, she could turn to this other living creature, as much concerned as herself, but so happily unconscious. She would sing the cradle-song to him:—

'Now hush-a-baw, lammie,
And hush-a-baw, dear,
Now hush-a-baw, lammie,
Thy minnie is here;
The wild wind is ravin,'
Thy minnie's heart's sair,
The wild wind is ravin',
But ye dinna care.'

And very glad was she to take the last of these lines as solace to herself. It may be mentioned that Walter Lindsay, incidentally, of course, asked Janie, in a letter, whether it was likely that Sabina had heard of the Highland mother's pet name for her child—'the lamb of my heart;' and it is to be guessed that that piece of information was not long in finding its way down to Witstead. Sabina was glad to have the pretty phrase; the fact implied in it she had already found out for herself.

But soon this uneventful solitude was to be startled by unwelcome news. Old Mr. Foster wrote:—

'DEAR DAUGHTER-IN-LAW—Mother has grown much worse. She anxiously wishes to see you, and the boy, if it is possible. Tell Fred he must come at once.'

She feared what this might mean, and instantly telegraphed to Captain Raby for her husband's address. To her astonishment and indignation, instead of answering this telegram forthwith, Captain Raby made his appearance at Witstead Cottage, and hoped that she would command his services in any possible way, if he could be of assistance to her. She briefly answered that all she wanted was to know where her husband was at that moment. She remained standing, her tall figure drawn up to its full height; her mouth firm; her eyes proud and invincible. It was he who was somewhat abashed; and he began to make a few excuses for his visit—saying it was necessary just then to be a little cautious in revealing Fred Foster's whereabouts, and the like. And then, twirling his waxed moustache the while, he endeavoured to introduce a little bland facetiousness about Mr. Foster's ways and weaknesses; and clearly wished to be asked to sit down and prolong the interview. Sabina had no such intention in her head. With cold insistence she got from him, if not her husband's actual address, at least the name of a person in Yorkshire who was in communication with him; and then with a formal 'Thank you; good-morning,' Captain Raby found himself dismissed and free to return to London. His temper was not improved by this visit, as one or two of his associates discovered that afternoon.

Sabina, not understanding precisely why her husband

should wish to remain concealed for the moment, concluded that it would be better not to telegraph to him; but she wrote him an urgent letter, telling him of the news she had received, and begging him at once to go down to Buckinghamshire. As for herself, he would know it was impossible for her to go; she had not the money, for one thing.

She posted the letter at once, but she might have spared herself the trouble. The very next morning there came a telegram; she opened it with trembling fingers; it contained a brief and laconic message from a broken-hearted old man —'*Do not come.—All is over.*' Sabina let the paper fall on the table. That gentle-eyed woman had been very, very kind to her. And it seemed so pitiless that the one idol of her life—for whom she had striven so much, for whom she had sacrificed so much—should not have been with her in her last hours. It was impossible that he could have got the letter. It was next to impossible that any intelligence of the approaching end could have reached him.

It was three days after that, and late in the evening, that Fred Foster suddenly made his appearance at Wayside Cottage. She was horrified beyond measure at the sight of him. He was as one demented; his face white and haggard; his eyes furtive, and yet with a strange glare in them; and his clothes were crumpled and soiled as if he had been asleep on the floor of a third-class carriage.

'Did you get my letter?' she said breathlessly.

'What letter?' he said—and his speech was thick in his throat. 'No, I got no letter. I saw the—the announcement in the *Times*. My God!'

He was pacing up and down the room like some wild beast in a cage.

'Did she send no message to me? Was there no message for me? That's what I have come for. Surely—surely—a word——'

'Here is the letter from your father,' she said gravely; and she handed it to him.

He glanced hurriedly over it; and then, with a slight cry as of pain, he threw himself on the sofa, face downward, and broke out into a wild fit of sobbing. She was terrified.

For a young woman, she had seen a great deal of human sorrow; but she had never seen a man so moved before.

'I wish I was dead too,' he said, in broken sentences, between the sobs, 'and it would be better for everybody. Oh, I can see it well enough. I wish I had never been born. It's been my luck all the way through to bring misery to every one, and what's the use of holding on now when you can only do more and more harm? It's no good trying any more now; everything's against me; and there she has gone away just when I was at the worst. But—but I can make reparation—to others. The old man won't have to fret any more. And—why did you ever marry me? I told you what kind of fellow I was. I might have been better if there had been a little luck; but it was all against me. And you'll be all right; you are a strong woman. Yes, you are a stronger woman than I am a man; but there is something you are not strong enough to do; and I am going to do it; it's the only thing I can do now. I am going out of this world altogether—it's the only reparation I can make; if the poor old Mater knew, she would say I was doing right——'

Sabina went to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

'Fred, you must not talk like that! Tell me, are you going to the funeral?'

'I daren't—I daren't,' he groaned. 'I would kill myself on her grave. And perhaps the best thing, too, that could happen, for it's all over now.'

'No, no; don't take on so,' she said soothingly. 'See, here is a piece of porcelain that I have been painting for baby's birthday, with the date on it, and a wreath of mixed none-so-pretty and forget-me-not. Janie is going to have it glazed and fired for me.'

By and by he rose; but he would listen to none of her proposals that he should have something to eat or drink, or that he should go to bed. He would not go upstairs that night, he said; he was going out, and might be back late; he did not wish to wake the child. And then he wandered away into the darkness.

It was about three in the morning when he returned; and thereafter she, lying awake in the silence, could hear

him pacing up and down; and sometimes she thought she could hear him say 'Mother!' And if she was convinced that this passion of grief was sincere enough for the moment, still, she could not tell that the remorse accompanying it was likely to be a permanent or fruitful thing; on the contrary, as she looked away to the future (in those despondent hours that herald in the dawn), and as she considered that the one salutary and controlling influence over Fred Foster's life had now been taken away, she could only despairingly conjecture what the fate of herself, and of her child, that was dearer to her than herself, was likely to be.

CHAPTER XXX

AN OLD FRIEND

It was about a couple of months after this that Fred Foster was one morning walking in towards the town of Scarborough, carelessly switching at the wayside weeds with his cane, and apparently thinking hard. Indeed, so preoccupied was he that he would probably have allowed a smart little chaise, drawn by a pair of small brown ponies, to have passed unnoticed, had not the solitary occupant of the vehicle pulled up, and rather timidly pronounced his name. She was a woman of about thirty, stylishly dressed in a driving-coat of silver-gray plush, and beef-eater hat of the same material; and she would have been distinctly good-looking had she only let her face alone. But her desperate efforts to appear ten years younger than she really was were somewhat too obvious; her abundant yellow hair looked bleached; and her lips, that were a trifle thin and hard in expression, owed something, it is to be feared, to artificial aid. And yet, notwithstanding the aggressive character of her thin features and steely blue eyes, she was now regarding Fred Foster with considerable doubt, as if she was uncertain as to how he would answer her appeal.

'Oh, how do you do?' he said rather coldly.

She shifted the whip, and familiarly held out her right hand.

'There—let bygones be bygones.'

'I have no objection,' he said, and he stepped forward and took her hand for a moment. 'Who could have expected to meet you here? I thought you lived at Doncaster?'

'One word,' she interposed. 'Have you heard anything about me lately?'

'No; I haven't been about much,' he said, evasively.

'Then you may as well call me Mrs. Fairservice again, if you don't mind.'

'What?' he said. 'You don't mean that? Have you and Bernard——'

'Oh, don't talk to me about Charlie Bernard,' she again interposed, with a scornful little laugh. 'I've had enough of Charlie Bernard. I found him out in the end. Why, if you only knew what a hound he is—— But there, we won't speak about him. You never thought much of him?'

'I had no great reason to think much of him,' remarked Foster, who was too shrewd a man of the world to say anything more definite. He knew that this fair dame had a pretty violent temper; and no doubt there had been a quarrel—which very likely might get patched up again.

'And you?' she said, scanning him from head to foot with her cold, scrutinising eyes. 'You don't seem over-flourishing. I heard you had got into queer street?'

'You heard right, then,' he answered, rather gloomily.

'And you, of all men in the world!' she said, with a sardonic little laugh. 'I wonder how you like being hard up. I should be curious to see how you bear it. Somehow I can't imagine your living up a tree. It doesn't seem natural. I suppose you swear a good deal?'

'Oh, I assure you it is quite a laughing matter!' he retorted, a little bit nettled.

'No, no, I didn't mean that,' she said at once. 'Come, tell me what you are doing in Scarborough?'

'I have just been out to Holkley Hall. Raby is there just now—you remember Captain Raby?'

'Of course I do.'

'Well, he's trying to fix things together for me. You may laugh as you like, but living the life of a badger in a hole is rather monotonous. And it wasn't through any fault of mine that I got into this mess. It was Cherry-band that broke me—of course you heard of the drugging of Cherry-band? Oh, I can tell you, I have had some rare

experiences of human nature since then. I never had a high and mighty opinion of my fellow-creatures; but it was little I knew how mean they could be until I got broke.'

'Yes, on the turf it is every man for himself and the devil catch the hindmost. And the worst of it is that the devil does catch the hindmost.'

But she did not seem interested in what she was saying, or in what he was saying either. As he went on to detail his woes and wrongs she listened in silence, looking at him from time to time, as if she was pondering over some very different matters. At length she said abruptly: 'Will you dine with me to-night?'

He hesitated.

'Are you at an hotel?'

'Yes,' she said, and she named the hotel.

'Do you mean the *table d'hôte*?' he asked, with an involuntary look downwards at his attire, which was none of the smartest.

She instantly understood his hesitation.

'No, we will dine in my sitting-room. Come as you are, of course. At seven, that we may have a good talk afterwards. Is it a bargain?'

'Very well—thank you,' he said.

'Mind, it is Mrs. Fairservice you ask for. Good-bye just now.' And therewith she touched the ponies, and drove on.

Towards seven o'clock that evening he made himself as trim as was possible and went along to the hotel, where he found Mrs. Fairservice, very elegantly attired, and apparently in a merry mood. Glancing at the table, he saw that it was laid for two.

'You have no one with you?' he asked.

'Oh dear, no; I think I can take care of myself,' she answered blandly. 'And they know me at this hotel.'

She had ordered a neat little dinner for him, and was evidently well acquainted with men's tastes. The things were all good of their kind, but not too numerous; there was no dawdling over sweets; the wines were excellent; and awaiting him there lay on the mantelpiece half a dozen cigars—not greeny-gray, nor foxy-red, nor black with bitter-

ness, nor veined with oil, but (when stripped of their silver-foil and tissue paper) plump, smooth, softly-brown Cabanas, with promise of supernal joy.

'I can hardly help laughing,' she said, when together they were seated at the table, 'to think of Master Fred being up a tree. Honestly now, did you ever deny yourself anything!'

'Never when I could get it,' he answered frankly. 'What is the use?'

'You're married, aint you?'

'Yes.'

'Where's your wife?'

'In Surrey—Witstead—near Epsom.'

'How does she get on?'

'What do you mean?'

'Who supports her? You can't, I know.'

'Oh, she has money from her father, and from my father too. That is a pretty joke. To spite me, I suppose, the old gentleman prefers to pay over my allowance to her. But it's the same thing in the end.'

'Yes, I should imagine so,' she said, drily. 'What do you think of that Chablis?'

'It is very good indeed.'

'They told me it was.'

'But why don't you take any?' he asked.

'Well,' she answered, 'I have had some vexations to get through lately, and I find that wine keeps the brain too much alive to these things—especially if you are lying awake at night. I don't worry so much when I keep to water.'

'Don't you drink wine at all, then?'

'Sometimes I have a little champagne. Here, waiter, open that bottle.'

'Yes, madam.'

'What worries have you had?' Fred Foster asked, with that masculine disregard of the presence of servants which women never acquire.

'I will tell you presently,' said Mrs. Fairservice, with a discreet wink.

But even when the waiter had gone from the room she seemed to wish to keep away from that topic. Indeed they

had a great many things and persons to talk over; and among them—a topic to which Mrs. Fairservice pertinaciously, and Fred Foster most unwillingly, returned—was his wife.

'What kind of a woman is she?' his companion asked frankly.

'Oh, she's a good enough sort,' he answered, with some reluctance. 'Rather lofty in her notions sometimes, for the humble likes of me. Brought up among philanthropic fads, and that kind of thing. Why, I believe, if she had a sixpence to spare, she would sooner send it to the soup-kitchens at Westminster than spend it on her own child.'

'What?' Mrs. Fairservice cried, with a burst of rather thin-tinkling laughter. 'You don't mean to say you are a papa?'

'Yes, I am.'

'Well, well, well. Wonders will never cease. To think of Master Fred being a father! You don't look it somehow. But about your wife—I heard she was the daughter of a swell?'

'I don't know what you call a swell,' he said rather sulkily. 'She is the daughter of Sir Anthony Zembra, who is the meanest cur in these three kingdoms. However, I'm going to have all that put to rights as soon as I can go south. I'm not going to stand it any longer. There's my father, who is a poor man, he gives us more than Zembra does. But that will soon be put straight. Raby is patching up my affairs. And when I get south, I'm going to have a little settlement with Sir Anthony Zembra. I'm not going to support his daughter.'

Mrs. Fairservice deliberately put down her knife and fork.

'You are not going to support his daughter,' she slowly repeated. 'Well, you are a most delightful wag!'

But the quick glance of anger that he darted at her showed that she had gone too far, or else that he had drank too much champagne; so she instantly changed her manner, and began to prophesy smooth things; and to say that Sir Anthony Zembra, if approached in the proper way, would of course come to the aid of his son-in-law.

Dinner over, coffee was brought in; and she herself fetched him a cigar, which he lit, drawing his chair a little bit back from the table. She went and stood by the fireplace, her back to the empty grate. When the waiter had removed the things, and they were once more left alone, she said, 'Now I am going to tell you something. Perhaps you won't be surprised. You say you have had some experience lately of human nature—meanness, and that. Well, so have I. What would you say, now, if I told you that it was Charlie Bernard who threw *me* over?'

There was a curious smile on her lips, somewhat belied by the look in her eyes.

'I should say you had had a quarrel,' said Foster prudently, 'which you will soon make up again.'

'There was no quarrel,' she said, with an increasing harshness in her voice. 'He deliberately threw me over—left me—for some barmaid or other at Chester—going to marry her, I hear! And I made that man! What was he five years ago? You know. Scarce enough to buy himself a toothpick. And there at the Ackworth sale last week he gave twelve hundred guineas for Trigonella and eight hundred for Master of Roy. Two thousand guineas at one sale—how did he come by that, do you think?'

'He has had the devil's own luck,' Foster said pensively. 'Everything he has touched has turned to gold.'

'And who put him in the way of making a single farthing?' she demanded. 'Luck? What is your luck if you've nothing to back it with? You know well enough what I did for that man. Well? Don't you think I take it very quietly? You used to gird at me because of my temper. Am I in a temper?'

He looked at her.

'I don't know,' he said. 'But if you got a chance of doing Charlie Bernard a mischief, I shouldn't like to be in his shoes!'

'Vitriol-throwing?' she said, with a harsh laugh. 'Oh no, I won't spoil his beauty—I'll leave that to the barmaid, and welcome.'

And then, with a surprising suddenness, she stepped

forward to the table and put her clenched fist on it; and her eyes were sparkling with rage, and her face was thin and hard and white.

'No,' she said, with a fury that was all the more obvious from her efforts to conceal it, 'I won't spoil his beauty, but I'll ruin him. I tell you I won't rest in my grave until I have ruined that man. I made him; and I'll break him!'

'You won't find it easy to get the better of Charlie Bernard,' Foster observed.

'Bah! That's all you know,' she said contemptuously. 'That's all you know. But I understand Charlie Bernard down to his boots; and I tell you he's a fool. He thinks he can't go wrong. The luck has been with him so long that his head's turned. And that's where I'll have my gentleman, see if I don't!'

She resumed her station by the fireplace. That sharp ebullition of rage over, she strove to appear perfectly calm. But her mouth was cruel.

'And how do you propose to get at him?' Foster asked.

'That's my affair,' she said, shortly. 'But I don't mind telling you that I mean it. I shouldn't mind telling all the world; for I daresay Charlie Bernard himself has a shrewd notion that I will do my little best. And I haven't been in all his stable secrets for over four years for nothing.'

And then she said, looking hard at him: 'Of course I should want somebody to stand in with me. I couldn't appear myself. Charlie Bernard is conceited; but he is wary enough; and he'll be watching me for many a day to come. No; I must have a trustworthy agent to do the trick for me; and if we pulled it off, it would be well worth his while.'

That she was referring to himself was clear enough.

'But I don't quite understand what you are driving at,' he said. 'Do you mean fair means or foul?'

'I didn't know there was any difference on the turf,' she answered saucily.

'Well, I have no reason to be nasty particklar,' said he, with a laugh. 'I don't see why you shouldn't hit back with the same kind of stick that hits you. If nobbling is to be the game, it shouldn't be all on one side. But it's a

very dangerous game, and not often tried nowadays; at least, it doesn't succeed very often. They managed it pretty well with Cherry-band, though.'

'Well, what do you say?' she asked abruptly.

'Oh, I'm not in it. You must look out for somebody else. I'm broke. Of course you want somebody who can weigh in with coin.'

She paused for a second or two.

'I don't know about that. Of course I should like to have some one go in equal risks with me, if I was quite sure that at the last minute he wouldn't play his own game and land me. Besides, I don't know any one I could trust. I could trust you because it would be worth your while.'

'Thank you.'

'Oh, we'd better speak plain. I mean business this time.' There was a flash of fire in her eyes. 'I tell you, if I had to sell every stick and stone that I possess—if I had to sell the clothes off my back—I would do it to bring that man to the gutter. And it's there I'll have him, you mark my words. And I'm not in a hurry—no, no—I can wait and watch my chance. I'm not going to spoil it by rushing it. I'm not going to show my hand until I've got the odd trick safe and sure. But then—*then* I'll let him know. What will he take to, do you think? I should like to see him a billiard-marker at Gatti's!'

She rang the bell.

'I beg your pardon—I forgot to ask for liqueurs.'

'I would rather have a brandy-and-soda,' he said.

'Very well,' she said, and that was ordered.

Then she went over and sat down by the table. In her eagerness she seemed to take it for granted that Foster was willing to become her ally.

'Do you know Joe Cantly?' she said, when the waiter had brought in the brandy-and-soda and gone away again.

'Only to speak to.'

'If we could only make sure of Joe Cantly, the whole thing would be as simple as possible. Bernard and he are hand and glove in everything. But he would be a difficult customer to get at. He prides himself on his professional honour!'

'What!' Foster exclaimed. 'Why, they declare he roped Redhampton at Liverpool.'

'It's a lie,' she said bluntly. 'I was there. He no more pulled that horse than I did. All the stable were backing him, Cantly as well. No, I believe Joe Cantly has so far ridden as fair and square as any jock that ever breathed.'

'Every man has his price,' Foster said, as he went to the mantelpiece for another cigar.

'Yes, but I imagine Joe Cantly's price is rather beyond me. There might be other means,' she added musingly.

Foster looked up, but neither spoke nor smiled. What he said to himself, however, was, 'Does this woman really think she has youth and beauty enough to inflame the heart of that little shred of a jock?'

'Gratitude doesn't count, I suppose,' she continued. 'And yet he ought to be grateful to me. Why, he was only a stable-lad when I went first to Doncaster. It was I who got the General to give him his first mount, because I liked the look of the boy. I wish I could have an hour's talk with him, just to see whether his devotion to my dear friend Charlie Bernard is of an unusual kind.'

And then she said, 'Well, are you going to stand in with me?'

'I should like to know more distinctly what you're aiming at,' he said.

'Do you expect I can put it all down on paper at a moment's notice?' she retorted. 'Well, yes, I could. I'm aiming at the ruin of Mr. Charles Bernard—that's about it; and it's got to be done if a woman can do it. You mean the way of doing it? Well, that wants time. But I know this, that it is bad luck that makes most men reckless, but it is good luck that makes Bernard reckless. He'll back his fancy through thick and thin; no hedging for him; no, no; my gentleman knows a horse when he sees one. The sporting papers have turned his head, that's the fact. He thinks he is bound to be right. And he is conceited, and knows that big figures make the stable-boys gape. There's but the one end for a man like that—when it is properly prepared for him. Now, do you understand?'

'It has been done,' he said absently.

'When do you go up to town?'

This startled him out of his reverie.

'I don't know quite. I went out to see Raby this morning. He has been trying to square things a little for me—and there's a young fellow called Russell who has turned out a bit of a trump——'

'I am going back to Doncaster to-morrow,' she said. 'And in about three weeks' time I expect to be in London. If you are there then you might call on me at the Northern Counties Hotel, Jermyn Street. You won't forget the address?'

He pencilled it down in his memorandum-book.

'There are some writs out against me, that's the fact,' he said. 'And people are so unreasonable. Of course you can't give them money if you haven't got it. All the summonses and county courts and writs in the world won't create money where it doesn't happen to be.'

'Ah well, of course,' said Mrs. Fairservice, who was a business-like woman, 'if you are in so bad a hole as that, if you can't get about, it's hardly worth while talking about that little scheme. But you say things may mend. Well, come and see me in Jermyn Street if they do. I may have something to tell you by that time—something to your advantage, as the advertisements say. You look as if you wanted it, don't you, Master Fred?'

Presently he rose to go, and she insisted on his putting the remaining cigars in his pocket. On the top of the staircase, as she bade him good-bye, she said, 'Jermyn Street, then. *Au revoir!*'

CHAPTER XXXI

A THREAT

ONE morning Sabina was seated alone and at work—painting some flowers on a terra-cotta vase. She earned a little that way now, thanks to Janie's intercession with the manager of a well-known firm in Oxford Street. It was but a small addition to her income, yet it was something; and she considered it as peculiarly her own; and made no scruple about devoting it entirely to the comfort and welfare and amusement of her boy. As for her other money, every farthing that she could save, by the exercise of the most rigid and constant economy, was claimed by Foster, whose demands were becoming more and more peremptory and extortionate. Not only that, but he had begun once more to insist on her going to her father, to obtain some more suitable provision; and plainly he warned her that, as soon as he was come south again, he would see that the present condition of affairs should be brought to an end. Sabina tore up those letters with a sigh. She knew that appealing to her father would be of no avail. And even if their income were to be doubled or trebled, what hope was there that Foster would change his mode of life? Indeed she tried hard not to think of these things; and kept herself busily occupied in tending the child, and looking after the house, and filling up every spare moment with this terra-cotta painting. But there was a shadow ever present on her brow; and her manner was grave; and she was a good deal paler than the Sabina of old. It was only when her boy stretched out his arms towards her that a soft lustre of happiness shone in the mild beautiful eyes.

She was seated at the table in her small parlour when she heard a slight tapping at the door.

'Come in!'

'A gentleman to see you, ma'am,' said the little maid-servant, and therewith Captain Raby stepped into the room.

She had been so much engaged with her work that she had not heard him open the front gate; and now she was so surprised by his unexpected appearance—having some swift momentary recollection of the way she had received him on a former visit—that when he said, 'I have brought you some news of your husband, Mrs. Foster,' she involuntarily asked him to be seated. He took a chair, put his hat on the floor beside him, and began to pull off his gloves.

'Yes—I—I happened to be in the neighbourhood,' he began, and he had evidently forgiven her curtness on that former occasion, for he strove to be most amiable in manner, 'and I saw Fred last week—the week before it was, really—and I thought I might as well drop in and let you know how he was getting along. Not very well at this moment, I am afraid, though there is something of a prospect for him; indeed I have a little commission on that subject from our mutual friend, Mr. Russell, whom you may remember, perhaps.'

She paused for a second; she did not answer.

'No, as I say, I don't think Fred Foster could be in a worse plight than he is just now. You see, he always was such a headstrong fellow. When things went wrong with him, nothing would do but that he must force them right; now you can't force things right if luck is against you.'

'Have you any particular news of my husband?' she interposed, somewhat coldly.

'Nothing very satisfactory—nothing that you would much care to hear, perhaps,' he answered, as he quietly twisted his moustache and regarded her. Then he added, with an ironical smile, 'Of course there are compensating circumstances in every lot, and Foster has at least hit upon one old acquaintance of his—an old flame of his, if I mistake not—a Mrs. Fairservice, who is pretty well off. But she is a very shrewd woman, is Polly Fairservice, and sharp; I don't

think she would be inclined to help him; unless she saw it to be to her own advantage.'

Sabina's pale face flushed slightly.

'Is that what you came to tell me, Captain Raby?' she asked.

'Oh dear, no,' he answered blandly; 'I only came to consult you as a friend. I wish I could make you believe that. But the last time I called on you you seemed to think it a very unwarrantable intrusion. Why? I offer you my services—in any way you choose to command them.'

'I have no need of them,' she said stiffly.

'But you might have need of them.'

'Will you tell me briefly why you are here?'

'Yes, I will. I have come in your own interests. I have come to consult your wishes. Believe it or not, I am come as your friend—why, how otherwise should I come? Why should I bother myself about Fred Foster's affairs except for your sake? I think you might recognise that a little. Well now, I want to know what you want done. Practically, Foster has deserted you——'

'I beg your pardon, he has done nothing of the sort; and I will not stay to hear my husband's actions discussed in any way whatsoever,' Sabina said, and she pushed away her painting materials as if, on the least provocation, she meant to leave the room.

'Very well, but the fact remains,' he said quietly. 'Now this is a very miserable life you are leading—alone, away from your friends, with no amusement, with no one to protect you——'

'That, at least, is true,' she said.

He continued without heeding the interruption: 'And, as far as I can guess, supporting a worthless fellow who never could earn his own living, and who never will——'

'Captain Raby, you come here as a friend——'

'Of yours,' he interposed. 'One moment. I ask you to listen to what I have to say. It rests with me to decide whether your husband is to come back here or not.'

She stared at him in astonishment.

'Yes, you are surprised, naturally; but such is the case,' he continued. 'Foster's affairs are in such a precious

muddle that he dare not show himself in any of his old haunts. Very well. There is only one man in the country who is fool enough to think of helping him out of the hole —and that is Johnny Russell; and Russell will act on my advice. Suppose I say yes, and get some money from Jack Russell; and square certain people, and pacify others, so that Foster may return to London, and come here also, what are you to expect? Do you think he will ever be other than he is? Would you like to have him back? Would it be to your gain, do you think? You see now that it is as a friend I have come to you—to consult your interests, and yours alone.'

He spoke rapidly and plausibly, and she was a little bewildered.

'But—but—in any case he must be coming back here,' she stammered.

He smiled.

'Without Jack Russell's help, I think it will be a very long time indeed before Master Fred will show his face on any racecourse in England.'

'But here—to his own house!' she said.

'The writters would be after him like a pack of wolves. No; you may rest assured, dear Mrs. Foster, that we can keep your husband from worrying you, if you wish it. If you will only look at your position in a sensible way; look at it as any woman of the world would look at it; consider what your life is likely to be if Foster comes back penniless and desperate; then, I think, you will take the obviously prudent decision of leaving him where he is. Why, the whole situation is absurd. A beautiful woman like you—and living in a place like this: the two things are not compatible.'

Sabina rose—her lips very pale—and she grasped the back of the chair with her hand.

'I don't know—I don't know whether you mean to insult me, Captain Raby——'

'I insult you! Is it an insult to call a woman beautiful? Then your glass must insult you every minute in the day!'

'But I must ask you to go. I do not wish to have my

husband's affairs, or mine, interfered with by any third person—least of all by you.'

'Oh, but really, now——'

'Surely, surely,' she said, with indignation in her voice, 'you will go when I ask you. You profess to be a gentleman!'

'Of course, I obey you,' he said, as he slowly took up his hat, and went to the door. 'But please remember it is for you to decide. And you may change your mind.'

When he had gone, she stood for a second irresolute, for there was still pride and indignation in the firm-set lines of her mouth; but the next moment her lips began to quiver a little, and presently she sank down into her chair again, and bent forward her head between her two arms outstretched on the table, and was crying and sobbing like a child. For she had been much alone of late; and somehow she had fallen away from the high courage of the Sabina of old; now and again a kind of despair would seize her; and she could have wished to have done with this world and its ways altogether—if only her child were asleep by her side.

But if Captain Raby imagined that by simply doing nothing he could keep Fred Foster in banishment in the north, he was mistaken. Quite unexpectedly one evening Foster made his appearance at Wayside Cottage.

'Why do you stare?' he said, sulkily, to Sabina. 'I am not a ghost. I want something to drink.'

He looked travel-stained and tired, and his boots were dusty.

'I am afraid there is nothing in the house,' she said.

'Nothing?'

'We never use anything of the kind; the girl has beer-money instead of beer, so we have no need for it.'

'Well, then, send to the Chequers—it will be open yet. Whisky, gin, any poison they have. Why don't you keep decent spirits in the house? Saving, I suppose—cheese-paring—as if that was any good. Well, there's got to be an end of that now. The farthing system has got to be abolished.'

She went to give instructions to the maidservant. When she came back he said, 'I suppose you haven't been to your father?'

'No, Fred, I——'

'I thought not. Well, I have come here to see that you do go, and that you make your going worth while. There's to be no nonsense this time, I can tell you; it isn't a time for nonsense.'

'I am quite sure, Fred,' she pleaded, 'that it won't be of the slightest use.'

'You've got to make it be of use,' he replied. 'I must have two hundred pounds within the next three weeks; and that only as a beginning.'

'You know it is impossible!' she exclaimed.

'I know nothing of the kind. But I do know that it depends on you, if only you will put your fine feelings in your pocket.'

'What can I do, Fred? What am I to say?' she asked, in a kind of bewilderment.

'The first thing you can do,' he said, coolly and methodically, 'is to sit down and write a letter to my father, asking him for fifty pounds. If you pitch the appeal strong enough, you will get it easily. Very well. I can put my hands on the remaining hundred and fifty as soon as I can show a reasonable prospect of paying it back by instalments; and it is for *your* father to provide that by doubling your allowance. That is clear enough, isn't it?'

'And even if you were to get the money, Fred——'

'Well?' he said—for she had hesitated.

'Would things be any better?'

'I don't know what you mean,' he said roughly. 'Sentiment, I suppose. Well, it isn't a time for sentiment with me, I can tell you. And when there is a chance of my pulling through, I'm not going to lose it without a fight. It's you that have got to provide the means. And that money I'm going to have.'

'But why should you threaten, Fred?' she remonstrated, for his attitude towards her was quite menacing. 'If I can get the money for you, you know I will. Don't I give you every farthing I can?'

'Oh, these paltry pittances are no good. I tell you, this is a serious matter. It's my last chance. And if I miss it then I'm off to America or Australia, and that's the last you'll see of me.'

Here the girl came back from the Chequers, and Foster, having mixed himself some drink, lit his pipe.

'But I hope to get even with Raby before that,' he said moodily.

'What has he been doing?' she asked.

'Oh, only like the rest! It's wonderful how you find out what human nature is when you're down on your luck. Quite useful it is—gives you such an insight. Here was Raby professing to be great friends with me, offering to go up to London to square up matters for me, pretending he had begged Johnny Russell to give me a hand. Why, it was by the merest accident I met Russell. Well, I *will* say, he is a good fellow, if he wasn't such a fool. And then he tells me that Raby had refused to take the trouble, and was so kind as to say that the country air was better for me than coming to town. But I'll be even with him yet.'

'I suppose you know Captain Raby came down here?' she asked.

He looked up angrily and suspiciously.

'What was he down here for?'

'He professed to be anxious to serve you.'

'By coming down here? Then I will tell you, the less you have to say to Raby the better.'

'I do not wish to have anything to say to him,' she answered calmly; 'and I do not think he is likely to come here again.'

The little maidservant now brought in supper, but he could not be persuaded to have any. Perhaps the simple repast of cold beef, bread, lettuce, and water did not look very tempting. Sabina sat down to the table by herself.

'You've never once asked about the boy, Fred,' she said reproachfully.

'Oh, I suppose he's all right,' he said, with some impatience. 'If he hadn't been I should have heard soon enough, I daresay. You know, when I see you sitting

down to a supper like that, it looks ridiculous; and it is ridiculous. It is perfectly absurd. No one would believe it. Of course my father isn't as rich as your father, still between them we should be living in a perfectly different way. Water! "Drops of crystal water!" Not a glass of sherry in the house. Why, what do you suppose your people are doing at home just now? Your father at the head of a big dinner-table, all the men smoking and passing the wine, the women gone up to the drawing-room, and thinking it about time to get ready to go down to the reception at the Foreign Office. That's living. And you are of the same family. Cold beef and lettuce! You know, it's perfectly absurd!'

'But we had plenty to live upon, Fred, when we married,' she ventured to remonstrate. 'Surely, in a moderate way, we had abundance of everything we could want.'

'Yes, because I had a good turn of luck then,' he retorted. 'It was all very well then, and you were satisfied. But now, when the luck's against me, now you complain.'

She glanced at him for a moment.

'I don't think,' she said slowly—'I don't think you ought to say that of me, Fred.'

'Oh, there are different ways of complaining; it isn't all done by talking. However, that's neither here nor there. That's not what I'm come about here to-night. I'm going to have one more try for it before I skip across the seas, and you've got to help me.'

When she had finished supper, and the little girl had come in to clear the table, he said to her, 'Now, the best thing you can do is to sit down and write that letter to my father; then I will look at it and see if it will do.'

She hesitated for a second or two.

'Fred, don't think me unwilling to do anything I can for you. But—but I would rather go to my own father than write to yours for money——'

'You've got to do both, and that's the fact,' he said bluntly. 'This is not a time for half-measures.'

She went rather sadly to her desk.

'I must see what he says in his last letter,' she said.

'He is more anxious than ever that I should go and live with him at Missenden.'

'Yes, I daresay,' Foster remarked. 'Very likely. But we're not going into the catacombs just yet.'

She sat down at the little table.

'What shall I say?'

'Don't you know yourself? Better not tell him I am here, anyway. Can't you ask for it on account of the boy? —that would fetch him. Or you can blame me for it— that will fetch him too: say I left some bills unpaid—that is true enough; and the people are worrying for their money, which is also as true as the gospel. Anyhow, pitch it strong.'

It is impossible to describe the humiliation with which Sabina set about writing this letter, but she wrote it nevertheless; and although, on looking it over, he grumbled that the appeal was not made sufficiently plaintive, he at length forbore to urge her further, and she was allowed to put the letter in an envelope, to be posted as soon as possible.

But the next morning his manner towards her was of a much more peremptory cast; for he had now to give her instructions about the mission to her own father; and that was of a far more serious nature than the mere borrowing of a temporary fifty pounds.

'You understand me,' he said, as he was preparing to leave, 'that I make you distinctly responsible for whatever may happen. It's absurd to imagine that a daughter can't get her father to be a little bit generous to her, if she goes about it the right way. Of course, if you stand on your dignity, so will he. If you give yourself airs, he will be glad of it; it will be an excuse for his saying no, and he will save the money. And mind you leave me out of it. Tell him anything you like about me—tell him I'm in a cancer hospital, or in America, or in Van Diemen's Land, anywhere where his money is not likely to be of service to me. It's for you and the boy. And considering the circumstances, he might be willing to plank down a good round sum to begin with. Everything will depend on how you do it——'

'Fred, I will do my best,' she pleaded, 'but don't be disappointed if he refuses. Is there no other way you can

save yourself? It seems so terrible to have everything depending on the one chance.'

'There is no other way, I tell you,' he said angrily. 'And of course if you go shrinking and cowering and assured of failure, you will fail. Very well; I tell you I will hold you responsible for what happens. But whatever does happen, you may be quite certain of one thing: if I am forced to leave the country, if I have to spend the rest of my days in Australia, I mean to take the boy with me when I go. So you just remember that.'

It was little he knew of the effect that these last words had upon Sabina, for he uttered them at the open door; and, without turning to look round, he walked down to the little gate, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXII

A CRY OF DESPAIR

SHE was absolutely stunned and bewildered by this threat; terror kept her motionless; she stood there like a statue, aghast and white; and then, urged by a sudden impulse, she went swiftly up the stair, broke into the room, snatched the boy from the nurse's knee, and wound her arms round him and pulled him close to her bosom.

'My darling! My darling!' she cried.

No tears came to her aid—she was too dismayed for that; she could only hold him tight to her; and as she walked up and down the room in a very agony of alarm and wild conjecture, she uttered from time to time breathless little moans, and talked to herself in broken ejaculations.

'He cannot—he cannot take my boy from me—the one thing I have on earth—the one thing—and that to be taken, too! God help me! Surely God will help me, if man will not. My lamb! If only we were lying dead together, that would be the best thing for us both.'

'What is it, ma'am; what is the matter?' the little maid-servant said, in great concern.

But Sabina paid no heed. She was as one quite distracted. She clasped the boy to her, and moaned over him as though her heart were breaking, and held his cheek to hers. 'My pretty one!—my pretty one!' she said. For in this first bewilderment of fear it never occurred to her to doubt the power of the father to take the child away from her; and well she knew Fred Foster's passionate and reckless malice when he was thwarted. And then those long years that rose as a ghastly vision before her eyes—

herself a lone woman, broken-hearted, and hopeless—her boy growing up without her care, in some distant part of the world. And if these two were ever to meet they would be strangers! They would not know each other. They might pass each other in the street without recognition.

Then of a sudden there flashed through her burning brain the question whether the law would not protect her against this foreshadowed outrage. But here all was agonising doubt. Surely the mother was the natural guardian of her child; surely no one could take him away from her? And yet she had a haunting memory of having heard—and of having sympathised with—denunciations of the iniquity of the laws of England on this very matter. What was it they had said? She could not tell. She was too agitated and alarmed to think clearly; her endeavours to convince herself of her safety, and her shuddering fears that after all he might have the power to take her boy away from her, were only productive of mental torture; and at last, in her abject dread and despair and helplessness, came the resolve to go instantly to London, to seek aid and counsel from her nearest friend. If Janie did not know, Janie would get to know, and at once. Life with this terror hanging over her was not possible.

She gave back the child in charge of the frightened little maid, hurriedly put on her things, and went out, walking quickly in the direction of the Vicarage. The Vicar's family were the only people whose acquaintance she had made in the neighbourhood, and she had made it in this way. It appeared that the households of better standing in that small part of the world had chosen, for some reason or another, to hold aloof from Mrs. Deane—a proceeding which was of very little moment to that lady, who spent most of her evenings in London theatres and music halls. It was probably owing to this circumstance that, when Sabina came to Wayside Cottage, the Vicar's wife did not call upon her; and then again, the young mother was wholly engrossed with her baby, and rarely appeared out-of-doors, preferring the solitude and freedom of the garden behind the cottage. But one day it happened that Sabina had taken the boy out in his perambulator for an excursion along

the public highway, when Mrs. Lulworth, the clergyman's wife—a brisk and sensible little woman, extremely proud of her husband, and of her daughters, and of her poultry, and of her connection with the established church of her native land—chanced to come along, and so met them. Now Mrs. Lulworth knew Sabina only as the tenant of Wayside Cottage; and had never seen her at close quarters; and she had half a mind to pass by without speaking. But just as she came quite near Sabina looked up; and the elder woman caught the expression of the younger woman's face, and of her gentle eyes. That was enough. She stopped. 'What a beautiful morning for baby to be out!' 'Yes, indeed it is.' 'The dear little fellow! How old is he?' That was the beginning. The next day Mrs. Lulworth and her troop of daughters called and left their cards. Then one of the younger girls, happening to see Sabina in the small front garden, went up and spoke to her, told her her name, was invited into the house, and returned home with an account which might almost have equalled one of Janie's rhapsodies. The acquaintanceship thus begun was soon assured; and if these good people rather wondered that they heard so little of Mr. Foster—for Sabina hardly ever mentioned his name—they had, on the other hand, discovered that their beautiful-eyed and gentle-mannered neighbour was a daughter of Sir Anthony Zembra, and that appeared to give them much satisfaction.

But it was not to seek counsel of this good little dame that Sabina was now hurrying along to the Vicarage, for she had no mind to tell the story of her life to people who were almost strangers. When she arrived at the house she rang the bell, and a servant appeared.

'Is Mrs. Lulworth at home?'

'No, ma'am, she has gone over to Banstead.'

'Or any of the young ladies?'

'Oh yes, ma'am; all of them. Won't you step in, ma'am?'

She followed the maid into the drawing-room; and there, indeed, through the open French windows she at once saw the whole of the five daughters—four of them playing tennis on the lawn, the fifth seated on a garden-chair, reading a

book, all of them in their light-coloured summer dresses, and forming as pretty a sight as one could wish to see.

It was to the young lady in the garden-chair that the servant addressed herself; and the next moment the book was thrown aside, and the reader was tripping across the lawn, and up the steps with the fleet-footedness of a young roe. But the instant she entered the drawing-room the brightness of her fresh young English face gave way to a look of alarm.

'Dear Mrs. Foster, no one is ill?' she exclaimed.

'Oh no,' Sabina answered (she did not know how evident was the anxious distress written in her eyes), 'I am —am rather hurried, that is all. I have to go up to London suddenly; and you see I don't like to leave baby in charge of the little girl all by herself there. I was wondering whether your mamma would allow one of the maids to go along and keep her company till the afternoon, when I shall be back. I am frightened to think of anything happening while I am away—Ann is a good little thing, but nervous——'

'Oh, but that's all right,' said the young lady blithely. 'I'll go along and take charge of the boy myself——'

'Oh, please, no; I couldn't think of giving you so much trouble,' Sabina protested—but feebly; for she knew where the most tender care would be forthcoming.

'Oh, but yes, yes, yes. Indeed I insist. You don't know what friends we are. He is my king-favourite among all the children we know. Did you hear that he called me Cissy the other day when we were all at the gate?'

'He talks a great deal now,' Sabina said—for the moment pleased amidst all her trouble.

'But that's not it,' the young lady interrupted. 'I am the only one of us girls whose name he remembers, and you may imagine that I am very proud of it; they tell me I needn't swagger so; but he's my particular friend, anyway; and just you trust him to me for the day, dear Mrs. Foster: we shall have the most delightful fun.'

'It is really so very, very kind of you,' the grateful mother said. 'And when would it be convenient for you to go along?'

For answer Miss Cissy darted out of the drawing-room,

whipped up her hat that was lying on the lawn and put it on her head, and was back in an instant.

'Now. If you are going to the station, I'll walk as far as the Cottage with you. Oh, if I had only known, I could have made him a hundred playthings. But we'll find out plenty, I am pretty sure.'

Even this brief bit of companionship was a comfort to her; but when she was again alone, in the railway-carriage going to London, the darkest forebodings returned. Nor could she get any enlightenment from thinking over those cases in her own experience where she had been partly instrumental in having children withdrawn from the custody of this or that parent—drunkenness being the invariable cause; for in no one instance had the law been appealed to; among these poor people the usual course is to follow the recommendation of the police-magistrate. And then again, supposing Foster to have the power of taking away her child, it was idle to think of appealing to her father to save her from this cruel wrong. How could she explain why this threat hung over her? Her only chance—and it was feeble enough, she knew—of getting any money from her father was to avoid all mention of Foster. He was supposed to be away somewhere—anywhere. It was for herself and her boy she was begging. Such were Fred Foster's last injunctions.

Arrived at Victoria Station, she took the underground railway to Notting Hill, and from thence walked to Walter Lindsay's house, which Janie and her husband still occupied. She was shown into the drawing-room. In a minute or two Janie made her appearance—in such a hurry of delight and welcome that she did not notice the expression on her friend's face. But after that close embrace, she retired a step to get a better look at her, and then she was startled.

'Sabie—what is the matter?' she exclaimed.

For a moment Sabina did not speak; she was afraid of breaking down; her lips were tremulous. And then she caught Janie's hand as if for support.

'Janie—Janie—he threatens to—to take my boy away from me!' It was a piteous cry for help, so stricken down was she by her terror.

'No—it is not possible!' Janie said, with frightened eyes.

'My boy—my darling—that was just all the world to me! My—very—life!'

But here she gave way altogether; and sank on to the couch behind her; and hid her head in the cushion; and sobbed and sobbed.

'My boy—my darling!' she kept moaning at intervals between her sobs. And then, in the very wildness of her grief, a confession was wrung from her that she had never uttered before: 'God knows, I—I thought I was—unhappy enough; but—but this is more than I can bear.'

Janie was frightened—overawed, perhaps; but not for long: she summoned all her courage to her, and she knelt down by her friend, and put her hand on her shoulder.

'Come, come, Sabie, don't give way so. Why, how you frightened me! You think he can take your boy away from you? What a silly notion! Where is all your common sense gone to, Sabie? You poor thing, you have been living so much alone that all your nerves are gone astray, and anything terrifies you. A threat? But what is a threat! A threat is nothing. And it's your husband, I suppose, who says he will take away the boy from you. I needn't ask. But he hasn't done it; and he won't do it; I suppose you think there is no law in this country? Come, come, Sabie dear, pull yourself together, and tell me how he came to threaten anything so ridiculous.'

Janie was very cheerful and courageous; but she grew less so as Sabina, rather falteringly, told her tale; and at the end of it she was very much concerned. For the truth was her knowledge of the actual state of the law was no more exact than that of Sabina herself.

'I'll go and ask Philip; perhaps he can tell us.'

At the door, however, she suddenly paused and came back. 'In any case,' she said desperately, 'in any case, the question need never arise at all! What you have to do is to persuade your father to give you the money; then the whole thing is right. No one will attempt to take the boy!'

'I will do my best,' Sabina said, with weary eyes and sad lips. 'But I have no hope in that direction—none whatever.'

Janie went away to the studio to fetch her husband; and on their way back through the garden she briefly told him Sabina's story, with some observations on the character and conduct of Fred Foster which might perhaps have startled that gentleman had he heard them. But she moderated her voice when they drew near the drawing-room.

On their entrance Sabina looked up quickly and anxiously.

'You see, now,' Janie exclaimed, with an air of triumph. 'You thought there was no law in this country? But if Phil tells you that you have the absolute guardianship of your child—that your husband can't interfere for years and years to come——'

'No, wait a moment,' the young artist said, less passionately. 'That is only my impression, Mrs. Foster—my belief. But, goodness knows, I am not going to say anything in favour of the law as regards the guardianship of children, for, as far as I know it, it is most abominable and wicked. I am not quite sure at what age of the child the father's legal control begins—but I know that then not only has he the sole right to say what education, what religion, what companionship the child is to have, but he can take the boy or girl, as it happens to be, away from the mother altogether. I hope I am not mistaken, but I am almost certain that is the law; and a more iniquitous thing was never imagined. It is simply playing into the hands of a scoundrel, for, of course, a respectable man would not take the child away from his mother so long as she was fit to have charge of him.'

He stopped and blushed hotly.

'I beg your pardon, Mrs. Foster,' he stammered. 'I was not even thinking of your husband—I was talking about the abstract question. And how I happen to know something about it is this—I know a case in which the husband, having promised before marriage that if there were any children by the marriage they were to be brought up in the

religion of the mother, changed his mind afterwards, took the children away from her, had them educated as he wished, and brought up in his own religion, and refused to allow the mother to see them—except under a judge's order, that enabled her to pay them a short visit at stated times. That is how I happen to know what the law is; and a more monstrous thing couldn't be conceived.'

'But, dear Sabie,' Janie said eagerly, 'in the meantime he cannot touch your little boy!'

'Do you think that is any consolation?' Sabina answered, but without reproach; her eyes were absent.

Philip Drexel turned to his wife. 'It's Mrs. Whittington who is sitting to me this morning. I shouldn't be at all surprised if she knew when the father can assume the sole legal control of a child. It's wonderful how much some of those people know, where their interests are concerned—all about rates and taxes, school-boards, county-courts, and things of that kind. If Mrs. Foster will excuse me for a moment, I will go and see.'

He went along to the studio, and returned in about a couple of minutes.

'For the first seven years, she says, the mother has the guardianship of the child. And I am almost sure she is right,' he added, on his own account—for how was he likely to know of the discretionary powers now invested in the higher courts?

Sabina turned very pale.

'When he is seven years of age? Janie, think! Just think of it!' she said piteously. 'The boy grows up with you—your only companion—every fibre of your heart answering to his lightest touch; and then, when he is seven, he is snatched away from you, and you may never see him again. God forgive me, but I could almost wish that my little one were dead now and in his grave: I should follow soon.'

She rose wearily.

'But in the meantime, Sabie, he is all yours,' Janie protested. 'And yours only. No one can touch him.'

'Think of my life with this terror hanging over it,' she said. 'And what can I do? I am helpless—helpless.'

Janie caught her by the arm.

'Sabie,' she said vehemently, 'you are not going out of this house like that. I will not allow you to go away in that frame of mind. And while Phil and I are alive you need not say you are helpless. What are you to do now? Why, nothing is more simple!. You and I will get into a cab, and we will go along to your father's house, or to the Waldegrave Club, or wherever he is likely to be; and then you must prevail on him to let you have the money—and there will be no question at all of taking the boy away. That is what has to be done—it is as clear as daylight.'

'Unfortunately,' her husband interposed, 'it can't be done just at this moment. Sir Anthony Zenora is in Antwerp.'

Sabina turned quickly. 'How do you know?'

'He is over there at the Industrial Congress; I saw the names in this morning's paper,' was the answer.

'Ah well, it does not much matter,' Sabina said, and her eyes looked tired and worn. 'I could not have gone to see him without thinking over what I ought to say to him. I will go back to my little boy now; I need not miss any half-hour of being with him—while that remains to me.'

'Janie,' said the young artist sharply, 'why don't you ask Mrs. Foster to stay with us for a few days until her father comes back from Belgium? The baby could be sent for.'

But Sabina would not hear of that; nor would she allow Janie to go back with her to Witstead. Janie went with her to the Notting Hill Gate Station, and then insisted on going on with her to Victoria; and there they had to wait a little while for the train. The time was spent mostly in silence; for Janie's heart was heavy within her—except when fiery pulses of indignation and wrath shot through it; and she knew it was not worth while giving voice to these. And even her parting words of consolation and hope died away before the terrible loneliness and despair of this woman's look. All the way home Janie was haunted by that look; and also there was ringing through her brain an appeal—a single phrase that she had heard or read, though at the moment she could not remember where—but surely it was a far-reaching cry of anguish—

'Is there no pity sitting in the clouds?'

CHAPTER XXXIII

ALLIES

WHEN Fred Foster went to call upon Mrs. Fairservice in Jermyn Street, it was not without studied preparation; his hat and boots and gloves were all new and neat; and he had taken the greatest care of his general appearance. As she came into the room, and carelessly gave him her hand, her sharp eyes noticed this at once, and she laughed a little.

'What, then?' he said rather resentfully, for no one likes to be scrutinised in that fashion.

'We're smart, ain't we?'

'What did you expect?' he said. 'Did you want me to come in a fancy dress, like a ready-money fielder?'

'I was thinking of Scarborough,' she said good-naturedly. 'Oh, don't you think I am objecting. Quite the contrary. I think your appearance now would be much more likely to inspire the confidence of the betting public. And I hope it's a sign of a change of luck—I do, indeed.'

She was putting aside the window-curtains to let a little more of the afternoon light into the dusky apartment, while he put his hat and gloves on a small side-table hard by. But when she turned to him again she seemed to be struck with something in his look.

'Hello,' she said, 'what's the matter with your eyes?'

'There's nothing the matter with my eyes,' he said, with still further subdued resentment. 'There seems to be with yours, though. They're remarkably inquisitive this evening.'

'You don't drink,' she said. 'No, you were always too wide awake for that. What have you been doing?'

He was both impatient and angry; but did not dare to

show it. He muttered something in an apologetic way of his having suffered severely from toothache of late, and of his having tried chloral to procure him a little rest. He did not choose to tell her that it was the sleepless nights of agony and remorse following his mother's death that had driven him to this dangerous remedy.

'Then you'd better stop,' Mrs. Fairservice said plainly. 'If you and I are going to do anything together you'll want a level head. I suppose you understand?'

'Don't you be afraid,' he said, 'I can't see how an attack of toothache is going to interfere.'

'Come, sit down and tell me how your affairs are,' she said in a friendly fashion, but still regarding him with a watchful eye. 'At any rate, you are in London—that's a hopeful sign. Got everything squared up yet? Let me see, who was it who was coming in as peacemaker?'

'Oh, I am all right,' he said, with an assumption of easy confidence. 'That is to say, everything wants a little time, but I see how it is to be managed. You mean Raby. No thanks to him. No; he played me a shabby trick, though Johnny Russell swears it was only carelessness or indifference. Well, it does not matter much. Russell has turned out a brick. And yet it does not seem such a great deal for a fellow with all his money to hold out a helping hand.'

'You see, Master Fred, that depends,' Mrs. Fairservice remarked, coolly. 'One does not like in any case to throw good money after bad. I am glad your young friend thinks better of your prospects. What's his little game?'

'I don't know what you mean,' he said.

'Why, what is his reason for coming forward in this magnanimous way, and hauling you out of the ditch? It isn't often done. What is his inducement?'

'Well, I call it pure good fellowship—friendship if you like.'

She shook her head.

'No,' she said, with a smile. 'That won't do. That's too thin. Or else he's an awful softie.'

'Women's views of friendship may be different from men's,' he said. 'I don't know. However, it does not

matter. The fact remains that I hope, with Jack Russell's help, to have everything fair and square in a very short time. And now the question is—What about Bernard?'

It was curious to notice the sharp and sudden alteration of her look. She had been quite pleasant and *débonnaire:* even her scanning of his appearance was not unfriendly; her cynical confidences were uttered in perfect good-nature. But the mere mention of Bernard's name sufficed to change all that in an instant. When next she spoke there was a baleful fire in her eyes, and her mouth was drawn and hard.

'I had half-forgotten,' she said, with a kind of laugh. 'Seeing you so smart, I fancied you had come to take me to the theatre. I had almost forgotten Mr. Bernard. One will forget one's best friends sometimes.'

She went to the sideboard, opened a drawer, took out a photograph, and, bringing it back, threw it on the table before Foster.

'There, do you know who that is?' she said, with another ironical laugh.

It was a portrait of a thin, wizened, prematurely old-looking young man, who was dressed as if he was going to a wedding, with a large 'button-hole' in his frock-coat.

'Well, you might call *him* a swell, now, if you like,' Foster said. 'Bought this out of a shop-window, I suppose? You see what it is to be famous. Cabinet Ministers, Archbishops, and jockeys; I suppose Joe Cantly was in excellent company.'

'You may suppose anything you like,' she retorted, 'but don't you imagine I bought that out of any shop-window. Oh no, that is a present from Mr. Joe himself. And that is the footing we are on now.'

'You've seen him?' he said quickly.

'Very much,' was the collected answer. 'Charlie Bernard was over at Redcar. Joe was quite pleased to see an old friend. And you should have heard him swear on his honour as a gentleman—his honour as a gentleman—that not a living soul should know I had spoken to him. Now what do you suppose a jockey's "honour as a gentleman" is worth? Can you put a price on it? No; I don't want to say anything against the young man; he was very

friendly with me, very grateful; I believe I could bring tears to his eyes by appealing to his noble sentiments. Wouldn't you like to see that? I should. Fancy a jock with tears in his eyes—his hand clasped on his heart——'

'Yes, but did he say anything?' Foster interrupted.

'Yes,' she said slowly; 'he told me that the rumours they have been putting about that Jackson will never be able to bring Roscrawn thoroughly sound to the post are all gammon. The horse is as fit as a fiddle. That might be a good thing for you, eh? But I suppose you're not doing much business with the pencillers at present?'

'You know that is not what I asked you,' he said peevishly.

'Well,' she said, 'you and I must understand each other, Master Fred. I should want to see you in a rather more secure position before chancing anything. How much time do you want? I confess I am in no great hurry. If I go for Charlie Bernard at all, it will be a thorough thing, I can tell you; and I can bide my time. Indeed, there's nothing else to be done at present. With Goodwood, Brighton, and Lewes over, there's nothing worth mentioning now till the Leger—except the Ebor Handicap, and Cantly says that Bernard has no great faith in Red Manual.'

'He's not going to back Red Manual?' Foster exclaimed—but this was really intended to give her the notion that information of the kind was becoming valuable to him.

'To no great extent, anyway, if the immaculate Joe is to be believed. So that's not to be thought of. No, no; as I say, I'm going to take my time; Joe and I are far, far, far from being sufficiently friendly as yet; and as for you—you're no use to me as you are.'

It was plain speaking, but he did not wince.

'You want time for yourself. Give me the same,' he said; and then he added, 'I suppose you have some engagement for this evening.'

'I? Not I. I only came to town this morning.'

'You spoke of the theatre,' he said rather nervously. 'What do you say, now, to coming and dining with me at

a restaurant, and then I will send up a commissionaire to one of the Bond Street agencies to secure a box?'

She was inclined to look upon this as a piece of bravado; but guessed that perhaps he had fallen in with a little money somewhere. And he had; for the fifty pounds had somewhat unexpectedly arrived from Buckinghamshire; and Foster was determined to make this go as far as possible in showing evidence of his bettering condition. How much would Mrs. Fairservice imagine lay behind that little offer of a dinner and a box at the theatre?

'No; we'll divide that programme into two halves,' she said. 'You may go and see about the box now; I will order a bit of dinner for us here. What o'clock is it?'

Perhaps this was sarcasm; she could see that his watch-pocket was empty.

'I have left my watch at home,' he said. 'But I should fancy it must be close on six.'

'Then go and get the box,' she said. 'And I will order dinner for 6.30. We may as well see the farce, if there is one; and I have good, healthy, old-fashioned tastes.'

Now not only did Mr. Foster go and secure for himself an expensive box at one of the best theatres, but also he went round by Covent Garden and purchased for Mrs. Fairservice a very beautiful bouquet. He himself carried it back with him to the hotel; and, when he presented it, there was no apparent cynicism in the smile of thanks with which she received it. Perhaps she was a little bit impressed by this display of affluence, despite her habitual shrewdness. At all events, here he was in London; and with so little fear of being laid by the heels, or otherwise interfered with, that he was proposing to go to a public theatre.

Indeed, as they sat at dinner, she became much more frank with him about her relations with Cantly, and her plans for working upon these. Once or twice, too, she seemed to imply that she was counting upon his—that is, upon Foster's—confederacy; and so anxious was he to assure her of his being a person worthy of trust that he would not, at first, touch a drop of wine.

'What's up now?' she said, when he refused.

'I don't wish to provoke any more complimentary remarks,' he answered.

'Oh, about the look of your eyes?' she said. 'If it comes to that, I would sooner see you drinking wine than drugging yourself with chloral. How long have you been at it?'

'How long have I been at it!' he repeated. 'How long does a fit of toothache last? About a century, I suppose.'

'Well, it must have been a pretty long fit to have altered your appearance so,' she said shrewdly. 'I fancied you looked rather white about the gills when we met at Scarborough. And that's not like you. You used to keep yourself in pretty fit condition.'

'I am as well as ever I was in my life,' he said, bluntly. 'And I will take some wine—I would rather do that than be picked to pieces.'

'Oh, I didn't mean to offend,' she said, good-naturedly. 'It was only a little polite inquiry. And by the way, Master Fred, it has occurred to me that, in view of certain possibilities in the future, it would be as well for you and me not to be seen together at that theatre to-night. One or other of us must keep in a safe corner in the box.'

'I quite agree with you,' he said, quickly. 'And as I haven't evening dress on, I'll keep in the background.'

In due course of time Mrs. Fairservice's carriage was summoned, and they drove to the theatre, where, if he remained discreetly withdrawn from the public gaze, she was very much *en évidence* indeed, with her opera-glass and fan and bouquet. It is to be feared that he did not pay great heed to the performances that followed. He had learned a good deal that evening. It was abundantly clear that, whoever might help him out of his present straits, that person was not Mrs. Fairservice. Further than that, it was just as clear that she would have him produce a pecuniary clean bill of health before accepting him as her coadjutor. On the other hand, she still seemed to count on his assistance; there was some little time yet in which to prove himself eligible for the honourable post; and the more he studied the possibilities of the scheme she was planning, the more he saw what a splendid *coup* it would prove for

himself, if properly managed. But in the meanwhile the paramount need was money. Money must be got at all or any hazards—if only to stay the mouths of the wolves who were hunting him.

When he had safely escorted Mrs. Fairservice back to her hotel, and made an appointment to see her that day week, he walked away up Regent Street to the Rochambeau Club, and asked if Mr. John Russell were within. The Rochambeau was a small club, of somewhat shady reputation, and chiefly devoted to baccarat, écarté, poker, and billiards. At this hour—a little after eleven—it seemed deserted: looking through the glass panels of the inner doors, Foster could only see one or two young men dawdling about, in evening dress and crush-hats, and apparently just arrived from the theatre.

However, one of these did happen to be Mr. Johnny Russell, who, when summoned by the waiter, came leisurely along into the outer hall, chewing a toothpick, and looking at once surprised and amused.

'Well, this is a fair piece of bluff, this is,' he said.

'I had to chance it—there was no help for it,' was Foster's answer.

'No, no,' the flabby and white-cheeked young man said facetiously, 'I can hardly believe it. What do you hold in your hand? Three aces and a pair I'll be bound. Or a straight flush? You've got something to show.'

'I wish I had,' Foster said bitterly. 'I've come to town to ask you to do for me what Raby sneaked out of. A shabbier trick was never played. Your excuses for him only make it worse; for he never need have undertaken it at all, if he didn't mean it.'

'Have a drink,' said Mr. Russell, coolly. 'That is one of the advantages of a proprietary club; you can have anything, at any time, and for anybody, that will put a penny in the manager's pocket. Or a bit of supper? The fellows haven't come in yet; there's nothing doing.'

'No, I would rather not go into the Club.'

Russell laughed.

'The cavalier in hiding—good subject for a picture.'

Foster considered the pleasantry rather ill-timed,

but was glad enough to find Johnny Russell in good-humour.

'Come out for a bit of a stroll,' he said. 'We can talk without risk of being overheard.'

Russell put on a light overcoat, and together they went out: the dusky thoroughfares around Hanover Square gave them ample opportunity of uninterrupted conversation.

'Are you going to stand my friend, Jack?' was Foster's plain question.

'To what tune?' was the equally plain answer.

'Well, if you will lend me £300—if I can show it—I can put my hand on another £200; and that together surely should pacify them in the meantime——'

'£300!' the other said, in less friendly fashion. 'Why, Raby never suggested anything so much as that.'

'No, because he didn't know what a chance I had,' Foster said eagerly. 'He thought it was merely to put me on my legs again. But it isn't that. I daren't tell you what the chance is—but it's a very big thing——'

'Oh yes, it's always so,' the younger man said, evidently disliking the whole situation. 'And perhaps it is a good chance. But you know, Foster, I don't quite see why I should pay in order to let you have another gamble.'

'It isn't gambling at all!' Foster protested—and he was earnest enough on this occasion—'it is giving me a helping hand to let me get my head above water—and just when there is a fresh start offered me. Besides, man, you will be paid—every farthing.'

'It's easy to say that,' the other grumbled.

'Oh, but this time it really is all right. As soon as Sir Anthony Zembra comes back from Antwerp my wife is going to him to get him to increase her allowance—there's the grandson to be considered, you see—and out of that increase she will pay you back the whole of the £300, if you only give her time. I need not appear in it at all. The instalments—monthly or quarterly, as you please—will be forwarded by her. It is as safe as the bank!'

'How do you know that Sir Anthony will give your wife what she asks?' the other said, still suspicious.

'Why, he's bound to! But I'll tell you what—wait and see. I am content to abide by the result.'

'Who is to let me know?' Johnny Russell said, rather coldly.

This was so plain an intimation that Foster's word might not be considered as all-sufficient, that for a second or two he was rather at a loss. But presently he said: 'Why, it's very simple. Will you be content with this? If my wife writes to you and says she is in a position to pay you so much a quarter, and will do so, will that satisfy you?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'And you will let me have the money?'

'Yes.'

'It's a bargain, then,' Foster said, with evident relief. 'Mind you, old fellow, I haven't said much about gratitude and all that, but I don't forget such things. It's when a fellow is down that he feels them most. Come,' he said presently, 'there's a public-house down there. Let's have a brandy-and-soda on the strength of this. I've been at the theatre this evening with a Mrs. Fairservice—and doing propriety. I should like a drink.'

'Public-house brandy,' said Johnny Russell rather gloomily. 'Why didn't you have it at the Club?'

'Oh, it's all the same—it's all corn and potato spirit,' Foster said cheerfully. 'It will be quite a new sensation for me to stand treat at a counter—a remembrance of old days, when you had got hold of a thirsty bookie and wanted him to give you something like Christian prices. The worst of these places is that their spirits are so diluted that you can hardly taste them; the only way is to have a double dose.'

So Foster and his friend went into the Private Bar and had their drink there, though Johnny Russell did not seem to like the look of this unfamiliar place.

'And how long are you going to face it out in London?' the latter asked. 'It's pretty cheeky, you know.'

'Yes, I believe you,' Foster said—to whom a deep draught of the brown brandy and soda-water seemed to have imparted a new animation. 'But I am quite aware

that the atmosphere of the metropolis of England is much too sultry for my constitution: I'm off to-morrow or next day. I shall vanish like a ghost—until I hear it's all right about the £300; and then I'll get you £200, and give you a list of people—the Jennings, and Jim Deane, and a lot of them, and you'll have to do your best to bring them to reason. I know you will do it far better than Raby. They would suspect him. He's too keen a file all the way round. But they must know you have nothing to gain; shan't we have a jolly little dinner, old man, when I can come back clear and safe—at the Bristol, eh?—the old room?——'

There was a kind of incoherence about his talk and manner; though that could hardly be attributed to drink, for he had taken very little wine at dinner, and had since touched nothing till now.

'Where are you off to, then?' his companion said.

'Oh, I'll find some safe quarters somewhere—where I can see a morning gallop or two. Not in Yorkshire, though, I hope; just you believe me, I had a baddish time of it when I was there. I never was so down on my luck——'

'You're not looking very well after it, anyway,' Russell said, regarding him with his pale, lack-lustre eyes. 'No, by Jove, you're not looking up to the mark.'

'Neither would you be, I daresay,' Foster rejoined, with simulated cheerfulness. 'Well, old man, you're off back to the Club, I suppose. I'm going down home to try and get some sleep. I've had some bad nights lately.'

Outside the public-house there were a few final words of undertaking and direction; and then they parted, and went their several ways.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE INTERPOSING HAND

'MOTHER,' cried Janie, bustling into the old-fashioned little dining-room in Kensington Square, and just a little breathless, either from some unusual excitement, or from quick walking, 'here's a splendid project, now! Phil has sent me down to tell you, for we want you to help; and if only we succeed, won't you be as pleased as any of us! Of course it's about Sabie; you may be sure of that. You can't tell how distressed Phil and I have been about her since we saw her last. Why, she has become quite a different creature from the Sabie we used to know—you remember how proud and merry and self-confident she used to be—a queen wherever she went; and now she is nervous and terrified and cowed: fancy our Sabie being cowed—by a whipper-snapper like that! But it's all through her passionate love of her boy; her alarm seems to have got the better of her reason altogether; you never saw anything like it. I believe Foster could make her sing in the streets if he chose; and I believe he would do it, if he thought he could get any money by it.'

'But about the project, Janie?'

'I am coming to that. I had a letter from Walter Lindsay this morning. He has been away in Canada; that is why we have not heard from him for so long. And now, he says, as we have been talking of paying our first visit to Scotland, his place in Wigtonshire is entirely at our disposal, if Phil and I think of going round that way. Isn't it good of him? His brother-in-law, who lives near, looks after the property for him; but there is no one living in the house.

He says it is a small place; but the grounds are pretty; and there is a lake not far off where we can have the use of a boat. Well, we had been rather undecided about going north; but that decided it; nothing ever came in so handy. You remember I told you Phil had been asked by some rich picture-buyer he knows—I forget his name—to visit him this autumn at his place in Islay; and there are to be three Academicians there, for the fishing and shooting; and Phil rather wanted to see what that kind of life in the Highlands was like—looking on, of course, for I shouldn't think he would be much use with a rod or a gun. But where could he leave me, that was the question. I wasn't in the invitation; I never saw the man; and the notion of my dawdling in a hotel in a Scotch town until Phil came back didn't strike either of us as fascinating. And now do you see how Mr. Lindsay's offer clenched the matter?'

'At any rate I cannot understand how any one should have two houses hanging useless on his hands like that,' Mrs. Wygram said. 'Why doesn't he come back to his own country?'

Janie sighed.

'Why? He says he gets fresh material over there; and sells his pictures easily. But I don't think it is that that keeps him on the other side of the Atlantic.'

'You have not said anything of Sabie in all this,' her mother reminded her.

Janie brightened up instantly.

'The moment we had settled the matter so far, Phil said to me "Now, look here, if your mother could only persuade Mrs. Foster to give up the charge of her child to her for that time, what is to hinder your beloved Sabie from coming along with us? I will pay her travelling expenses; Foster would have the whole of her income while she was away; he wouldn't object. And then if that place in Wigtonshire turned out to be a niceish sort of place, Sabie and you could remain there till I got back from Islay." Mother, just think of it!' said Janie, with a little laugh of delight. 'Think of Sabie and me walking over the hills, and rowing in a boat on the lake, and running about the garden. It is just a dream of happiness. And then, when

Phil comes back, we will all go on together to Edinburgh, I suppose. Edinburgh and Melrose Abbey; these are the two things I stipulate for. Phil can settle all the rest.'

'And my share,' said Mrs. Wygram, with a smile, 'is to take charge of the boy in London.'

'Ah, but we knew you would gladly do that for Sabie's sake,' her daughter said. 'When Phil proposed that she should come with us, he was thinking of me. She was to be a travelling companion for me. But that is not what I am looking forward to. I am looking forward to getting her away for a while from that man; to see if we cannot give her back a little of the cheerfulness and courage of the Sabie of old days. Of course, it will take a fearful amount of coaxing before she will agree to part with the child, even for that short time. You will have to talk her over, mother; or shall we go down together? You see, as soon as Phil has finished the last of the cartoons for Verner Castle, we shall be free; and although that won't be in time for him to see the shooting on the Twelfth—that is the great day, he says—still, we should get north as soon as possible. You'll come to see us off at Euston, mother, won't you? We may have to buy some rugs and wraps for Sabie; for it's always so cold in Scotland, they say. Oh, won't it be fine in that railway carriage; Phil may fall in love with her, if he likes; I don't care.'

'Yes, that's all very well,' the mother said (and yet she was quite willing to accept her somewhat invidious share in this arrangement), 'but you are putting all the difficulties on to me. It isn't the taking care of the little boy here—that we could manage well enough; it's the talking Sabie over; and I don't think I shall succeed in that.'

'But we must succeed and we shall succeed, mother,' Janie said. 'Phil has to go down to Verner Castle this week; as soon as he has fixed the day, I will let you know, and we will take that day to go to Witstead. And if you can't talk her into saying yes, I will force her.'

'You force her!' the mother said, with a smile.

'Oh yes, I can,' Janie said confidently. 'Sabie has none of her old masterful ways now. I am going to take the management of her. I will compel her to come with us.'

'Don't be too harsh with her, Janie.'

'That is so very likely!'

Then she went away with her brain very busy; and Kensington High Street became a place of dreams. What ideas Janie had formed of the region

Where the kingdom of Galloway's blest
With the smell of bog-myrtle and peat,

it is hard to say; but, like most people who have never crossed the Cheviots, she probably considered Scotland as synonymous with the Highlands; and no doubt had already romantic visions in her mind of beetling crags and lofty mountains and precipitous waterfalls. Had she been told that the people of Galloway wore the kilt and talked Gaelic she would scarcely have been surprised. But that was not the point. In these roseate forecasts of hers she was thinking less of the character of the country and its inhabitants than of her travelling about in the constant society of Sabina; that was to be the charm of this excursion, whatever the scenery or the people might be like. And she could not but be struck by the curious reversal of their positions. It was Sabina who was now to be the petted and protected one—Sabina, who used to be so headstrong in her good-humoured fashion, so self-reliant, so imperious and arbitrary in her very kindness. She could hardly think of that gay-hearted, wilful, radiant creature as being one and the same person with the poor, trembling, terror-stricken mother who had come to them but the other day, white-faced and haggard-eyed, to ask them whether her boy could be taken away from her.

But all these plans and forecasts were to be rudely and suddenly scattered. When she returned home, she was surprised to find her husband in the house; ordinarily, at this time of the day, he was busy in the studio. Moreover, he was clearly waiting for her.

'Janie,' he said, 'I have opened a letter sent to you. I saw by the outside it might contain news that—that would startle you. I thought it better to open it——'

For a second her heart stood still with fear. In his hand there was an envelope that was black-bordered.

'Not Sabie?' she cried.

'No,' he answered gravely. 'No, but her husband——'

He handed her the envelope; and quickly and breathlessly she opened it; and took out the contents. These were merely a cutting from a Yorkshire newspaper, containing the customary list of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, and at the foot of the middle section was the laconic announcement: 'On the 9th instant, at Market Hatley, Mr. Fred Foster, aged 29 years.' And then, on the margin of the paper, were a few words in a trembling handwriting that she recognised easily enough—

'DEAREST JANIE—Don't come to me just yet. I will write.—S.'

Janie looked frightened only for a moment; presently a kind of wonder shone in her face.

'Oh Phil,' she cried, in accents that certainly did not betray much sorrow, 'Sabie will come back to us—to Kensington Square—or here—will she come and live with us here? Just think of it! We will have the old days back again—and—and I will go at once and telegraph to Walter Lindsay!'

'You will do nothing of the kind; you will do nothing so unseemly,' her husband said at once. 'Are you out of your senses? And I don't think you need make it a matter of rejoicing that you should hear of the death of a fellow-creature.'

'Oh no, I don't—at least, I wouldn't, before other people,' said Janie, rather incoherently. 'But I thought there was no more hope in this world for my poor Sabie—and now there is—surely, surely there is, Phil. And why may not I go and see her now? Perhaps she has gone away north to the funeral? Then why didn't she telegraph to me to go down and take charge of the boy? I'm sure I would have done it instantly. But most likely old Mr. Foster is arranging everything for her.'

And then again she said, 'Don't be angry with me, Phil; but how can you expect me to be sorry? If you only knew as I know what she has suffered! And why may not I send a message to Mr. Lindsay?'

'You know very well,' her husband said. 'Before

even the dead man is in his grave! And how do you know it would be welcome? It will be much better for you to leave things alone.'

'I don't see how it could do any harm,' Janie said, wistfully.

'And there's another thing I may warn you about. When you do go to see your friend just you take care what you say about her deceased husband—if you want to remain her friend. It's wonderful how a woman's opinions are apt to change in a matter of this kind. She will let her husband ill-use her for years—she may have her eyes perfectly open to all his bad and mean qualities; but as soon as he goes and mercifully dies, it's wonderful how soon all these things are forgotten, and the dear departed becomes sanctified into a hero. It isn't reasonable, of course; but it's human nature; and although you used always to try to make out your Sabie to be a perfect goddess, without a fault, I consider her to be a very womanly woman; and I shouldn't at all be surprised if she were to begin now and look back with regret and remorse on her treatment of Foster.'

'Her treatment of Foster!' Janie exclaimed.

'Yes; I say it, and I mean it. She will accuse herself of not having humoured him sufficiently, of having shown him indifference or neglect—a hundred things; and she will think of all that was best about him; and blame herself for the failure of their married life. So you be warned in time. Don't you say a word against him; and don't look as if the news rather pleased you.'

She was rather impressed by these words of counsel.

'I suppose what you say is quite right, Phil,' she said, submissively.

But she had to go and do some shopping; and the moment she was out of the house this moderating influence seemed to fall away from her. For she was thinking over all that had happened since Sabina's marriage; and again she saw the anguish-stricken face of the mother dreading to be robbed of her child; and again the cry rang through her brain—'Is there no pity sitting in the clouds!' 'There is!—there is!—there is!' Janie passion-

ately said to herself; and she had no remorse whatever in rejoicing; the news, she declared to herself, and would hold to it, was good news.

She had to pass a telegraph-office, and there she paused for a second in wistful hesitation. It seemed such a pity that Walter Lindsay should not know. The message need not be meant as a summons to him to come back to his own country. It would merely be information. How could it be unwelcome, in that sense? Say, at the worst, that he was engaged to be married to some one else, he could not have quite forgotten his old regard for Sabina. Surely he would be interested in learning of her fortunes. Men were fickle, as she had heard; there had been great distances of time and space between these two; he had no right to cherish any feeling warmer than friendship for a woman who had married. But even friendship? Would not any friend of Sabie's be interested? And surely Walter Lindsay (if she understood him) most of all? So Janie argued with herself, loitering there irresolute; and then she remembered her husband's charge to her; and tore herself reluctantly away.

Indeed, she was rather proud of herself in that she could thus calmly consider the hypothesis of Walter Lindsay being engaged to be married; but, oddly enough, her next proceeding was to stop in front of a shop-window where were exhibited a number of portraits of ladies of the great world and of the stage, and to set about asking herself whether any one of them could be compared to Sabina. This one had a royal carriage of the head; that was pensive-looking, with mysterious dark eyes; the other was bright, vivacious, coquettish-looking. But where was the one of them who had Sabina's charm, her bland gentleness, her gracious repose? And then the next thing was to wonder if Walter Lindsay would find Sabina as beautiful as he had thought her in the former days? Philip said she was more beautiful; but then Philip worshipped the *Mater dolorosa* type in women; and Janie was not at all anxious that Lindsay should be struck with that aspect of Sabina. Oh no; long before he should set eyes on her, Sabie would be back in Kensington Square; the rose-leaf tint would be

returning to her cheeks and lips; there would be a subdued light of happiness in the calm and benignant eyes. As for Sabina's golden-brown hair, that was still as beautiful and abundant as ever—not all her troubles had sufficed to interweave in it a single silver streak.

Janie got her shopping done, somehow; and then she sped away home; and sought the quietude of her own room. She was rather a superstitious young person, in a half-doubting, whimsical way; and on occasion was accustomed to consult the *sortes Virgilianæ;* although, not being able to read Virgil, she had to substitute the Scriptures, as the early Christians did. It may be added that she was not strictly methodical in her divination; for, instead of taking the first passage that met her eyes, she claimed the right of searching the whole of the chance-opened page for an appropriate verse—a practice which frequently got rid of enigmas and brought her instead some little comfort.

So now, taking the small Bible that lay on her dressing-table, she shut her eyes, and opened the leaves at random. When she came to look, it was a chapter of Isaiah that lay before her, and quickly she glanced over the verses. This one was the last on the page—and Janie's heart was rejoiced and glad as she read and reread the divine promise of better things for the wasted and sorrowing city of Jerusalem—'*O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted! behold I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires!*'

CHAPTER XXXV

THE EXILE'S RETURN

It was not until the month of December in that year that Walter Lindsay left for home; and a very cold, gray, and cheerless passage he had of it across the Atlantic. But a landscape painter, of trained observation and retentive memory, has advantages beyond those of other mortals. At will he can dismiss his actual surroundings; and, by the mere shutting of his eyes, summon before him scenes from distant lands; and not only that, but these visions are ordinarily of unwonted beauty, because it is their beauty that has stamped them on his mind. Nay, he can occupy himself with filling in the minutest details of colour and form, until the living picture stands clear and sharp before him: no need for him to sadden himself, hour after hour, with the monotonous waste of the steel-gray, slow-rolling Atlantic seas.

You may be sure it was mostly England that was in Lindsay's thoughts, as, wrapped in Canadian furs, he paced up and down the chill decks on these blowy mornings; or, in the hushed evenings, in the great saloon, lay and only half listened to the heavy throbbing of the screw and the occasional singing of a group of girls. And he tried to be not always dreaming about Kensington Square. Here, for example, was a winter scene on the Sussex coast; and he added touch after touch to it, as if he had a canvas before him, and with a kind of affection almost. A bright morning shining over the wide, smooth, solitary downs; here and there a dark-green turnip-field; here and there a breadth of red ploughed land; a farm-steading near the horizon;

the new roofs of the barns and outhouses scarlet-tiled, the old roofs orange-lichened. A small hamlet in a distant hollow; a few pigeons flying about the weather-stained belfry of the church-tower. A long-winding, ruddy-yellow road in front of him, of chalk and sand and flint; the pools of recent rain—those near him—of a brownish-saffron hue; those a little farther off a faint purple (the reflected blue of the zenith mixing with the local colour); those still farther away of the most brilliant azure. A cloudless sky; a cold wind; the keen sunlight striking vividly on the long-trending lines of the chalk cliffs, and on the wide pale plain of the sea.

Or again, it would be a sheltered little bay that he had once discovered in the far northern wilds of his own country—a silent, unfrequented curve of white sand facing the western waves. And what beautiful bits of colour he found there, or placed there, as his fancy chose—brown and lilac pebbles, velvet-soft in the light, each with its touch of blue shadow; scattered masses of ox-eye daisies, hardly moving in the soft summer air; thistles purple-topped; the crimson-stemmed sorrel; the silver-weed, with its leaves of intensest green, and its long rose-red threads stretching out over the cream-white soil, and rooting themselves here and there. Behind him a golden-yellow corn-field; before him a sea of driven and vivid blue; beyond that a pale line of distant hills; and above these again a sky of faintest turquoise, deepening and deepening into a dark sapphire overhead.

Moreover, he had cultivated this habit of minute and patient picture-building for an especial reason. Once or twice it had occurred to him that his eyesight was not as good as it had been. Now an artist is naturally extremely sensitive on this point; and it is hardly to be wondered at that in the solitariness of his life among the Canadian lakes, or on the wide Colorado plains, he should sometimes have been haunted by gloomy forebodings. On such occasions he would summon his philosophy to his aid, and boldly face the worst. What, then, if he were to become blind? He had enough to live on. Probably he had given to the world the best he could do as an artist. He would retire to some place familiar to him—Galloway, most likely; and

spend there a by no means miserable existence; for surely, if his attendant gave him a hint or two—the flowers by the wayside, the look of the sky, the number of ships visible from Kirkcolm Point, and the like—he could construct out of his own memory some recognisable picture of his surroundings. No number of years could make him forget (for example) the colour of the silver-weed's rose-red stems creeping out on the milk-white sand. Then, again, in some distant time he might come to London. Perhaps at Janie's house he would meet Sabina. And then would he not have reason to rejoice? 'Why,' he would say to himself, 'look what an advantage you have over all these others. Sabina is middle-aged now; perhaps her hair is streaked with silver; perhaps the youthful brilliancy has faded away from her kind eyes. These others see all that; you do not. When you hear her speak, she is still to you the Sabina of former years; to you she remains ever beautiful, youthful, radiant; her eyes are more than kind, they have the witchery of young womanhood, and so it will be to the end. She grows old to others; not to you. So thank God for your blindness and rest well content.' Of course these were the morbid imaginings of a solitary life and distant travel. When he returned to New York—and to the Tile Club, and the Monks of St. Giles, and the theatres and dinner-parties, and the ordinary amusements and occupations of social life—he forgot all about them, and ceased to trouble his head about the matter.

But if these were beautiful pictures of England he was summoning up, as he paced the deck under the leaden gray sky, or sat in the saloon of an evening listening to the dismal boom of the foghorn overhead, England sorely disappointed him when he arrived there. It was raining heavily at Liverpool; and Liverpool on a wet, darkening December afternoon is not an exhilarating sight. On his journey up to London next day a cold damp mist lay over the land; and the great hive of the metropolis, as he drove through the sombre streets, was scarcely the brilliant city of his memories and dreams. But when he reached his home, there something more cheerful awaited him; for Janie (who had a house and her husband a studio of their own now),

had been along to see that the housekeeper had everything in readiness; and there was a big fire blazing in the dining room; and luncheon was on the table; and there were a few flowers also, placed there by Janie's own hands: altogether the place looked exceedingly bright, warm, comfortable, and homelike.

Luncheon did not take him long; but there was a vast pile of letters, prints, and packages to be glanced through; then he was ready to go out. But whither? He wished to see Janie; but it was rather early yet for an afternoon call. Eventually he put on his coat and hat and went out; and by instinct rather than intention wandered idly down to High Street, Kensington.

It was strange to find himself in the old familiar thoroughfare, and it looking so different from his storied memories of it. Somehow he had been used to picture it as under the light of a clear summer afternoon; himself come out after his day's work; perhaps with some faint hope of catching a glimpse of the tall form of Sabina on her way homeward to Kensington Square. But now the short December day was drawing into dusk; a pale blue mist hung about; the streets were miry. It is true that with all this the neighbourhood wore a festive air; evergreens and holly-berries were in the shop-windows; the pavements were crowded with elderly people who seemed benign of aspect, and who were generally accompanied by small folk who had the delight and excitement of Christmas presents clearly shining in their eyes. And he was glad to be home in England for Christmas.

At last—at last—and perhaps with some trifle of heart-throbbing that he would hardly care to have owned—he went a little way down Young Street, so that he could look across Kensington Square. It was a doleful sight enough—the leafless, smoke-blackened trees; the dank green grass; the dingy laurels; the bedraggled chrysanthemums; with the melancholy gray-blue pall of the twilight weighing heavier and heavier, and as yet unpierced by a single orange ray. And yet he had a curious kind of affection for this place; and the keenest interest in it; and those old-fashioned houses over there had a charm for him beyond any range

of palaces in Venice. They were very different, doubtless, from his dreams of them in the far Canadian wilds. There they had been of a golden cast; with light summer airs floating about them, and a June foliage on the trees; now they were dark, and indeed almost becoming invisible in the closing down of the melancholy London afternoon. But they were actual. They had human life within them. Was it possible that on this northern side (which he could not see) Sabina might be standing at the window of the well-remembered drawing-room, looking out on this very picture of desolation? He dared not go nearer. He wished to be prepared for meeting her, if he was to meet her. But he lingered about there for some time; until of a sudden a shaft of golden fire flashed through the dusk from the first-lighted of the lamps, and he thought he might now go and call upon his ever-faithful friend.

He found Janie in possession of a smart little house in Victoria Road; and the moment he entered the drawing-room she came quickly to meet him, with both hands extended, and with abundant friendliness beaming in her mild gray eyes.

'I am so glad to see you!' she cried; and added rather incoherently, 'And all of us—all of us—of course you ought to be back in your own country. I am so glad you have come back!' But there was some surprise in her face too. 'And how you have changed! I don't believe I should have known you if I had met you in the street. You are more like a hunter than an artist!'

'I have been living a good deal of a backwoodsman's life these last two or three years,' he said: and indeed she could have guessed as much; for the fine-featured face had lost all its pallor of former days and become evenly sun-browned; and his tall and slender figure had a touch of added breadth; and there was a more muscular set of the shoulders. Janie was quite proud—though she did not stay to ask herself why—to see him look so handsome and well.

Of course there were a hundred rapid and cheerful questions to be put and answered; and she gave him all the information she had about the people known to them;

but the subject really uppermost in both their minds was sedulously left out. Janie was a little frightened, in truth. Perhaps he had come home engaged? Or he might even have brought a wife with him? On his side, some kind of delicacy kept him silent. And so it came about that it was quite by accident that Sabina was brought into the conversation.

Behind him there was a picture he had not as yet seen, for he was seated facing the window. It was let into a panel over the mantelpiece; and on the oak framework there was inscribed, in curious characters, the word 'Hesperus.' The subject was the solitary upright figure of a tall young woman, clad in loose draperies, moving through the ethereal spaces of the evening sky; some sombre gleams of red beneath her feet; the darkening heavens above her showing here and there a distant star; her upraised arm and hand holding high before her a ball of luminous white fire. Her face was sad and wan; her mouth pensive; her eyes wide apart and mysterious and dim. Mannered even to the verge of affectation, this was really a very creditable piece of work; it showed, at all events, imaginative effort; and as it was a wedding-present that Janie had received from her husband, it is hardly to be wondered at that she had insisted on its occupying the place of honour in her drawing-room.

Now in the mutual embarrassment of trying to avoid all mention of Sabina's name, they had talked about a large variety of persons and things; and at last Lindsay came to speak of Janie's new house, which her husband had furnished in a highly superior fashion. Happening to cast his eyes about the room, he caught sight of this picture, and there was something about the look of the head that caused him to get up and go nearer. But he had not been there for a second—gazing at the pensive face and the dim and mystic eyes—when Janie was at his side.

'But, you know, Mr. Lindsay,' she said, rather breathlessly and anxiously, 'you mustn't think that is really like her—*really* like her, I mean—you know, that is only Phil's way of painting—Sabie isn't quite so—quite so—sad-looking as that. Of course it is a *little* like; but it was done from photographs and recollection; and, you know, Phil will

paint in his own way. Oh no, don't think Sabie is like that!'

And Walter Lindsay thought to himself, 'Well, men say that women are never really friends among themselves. But here is a woman who, for fear that an unfavourable impression of a friend of hers may be produced on a casual stranger, is quite content to speak slightingly of her own husband's work!'

'She is in London?' he said, still looking at those saddened eyes.

'Oh no,' said Janie, who, now that the ice was broken, proved as eager to give information as before she was reticent. 'No; I wish she was. She won't leave that house in Surrey, no matter what we say; it seems it was a wish of her husband's; though why she should respect any wish of his, or his memory either, I can't make out. Oh, Mr. Lindsay, I never told you half the truth about poor Sabie. I couldn't. I thought it was no use making you wretched—I mean, I naturally imagined you would remember something of her, however far away you might be, and you mightn't like to hear ill news of a friend. And I need not tell you now either, for it is all over; and I hope Sabie will forget it in time. And sooner or later, I know, we shall have Sabie coming to London; and there are two houses, anyway, where there is a home and a warm welcome awaiting her; for Phil is just as good as gold—why, where do you think he is just now?'

'I'm sure I don't know.'

'Away buying Christmas toys to send down to the little boy. And a rare hash he will make of it, I suppose, for how should he know? But I thought I would stay in, as I expected you.'

She went back to her seat by the table, and he followed her.

'I suppose you see her sometimes?' he said.

'Oh yes,' she answered; and then she added quickly, 'And if you were to call upon her, there would be no—no embarrassment, for we have tacitly agreed never to speak about the past at all. It is the best way; and we adopted it from the very beginning. You know, Phil has

a great deal of common sense and wisdom for one of his dreamy and poetical nature; and he warned me, the first time I went down to see Sabie, that if I said anything against Foster, she might very likely turn on me to defend him. Very well, I said to myself, if I am to say no harm of him, I will say no good of him; for I am not going to tell lies, even in the way of condolence; and if Sabie likes to forget, I won't. Of course it was very awkward; and I looked forward to meeting her with dread; but there happened the greatest stroke of luck. Just as I got out of the train at Witstead Station, so did Sir Anthony Zembra. I suppose she had sent for us both on the same day; but it was pretty fortunate we should go down by the same train. I thought that Sir Anthony would have forgotten me; but he spoke to me; and we walked to the house together. Do you see how lucky it was? I had to tell no lies, anyway, or profess a grief that I certainly didn't feel; nothing but the most ordinary commonplaces was said; Foster's name was hardly mentioned; what Sir Anthony wanted mostly was to get her to remove to London. You should have seen how he figured and posed as the injured party; how magnanimously he offered to forget the past; and produced a cheque for £100—this was before me, mind—to defray all little expenses, and leave her free to move into the house he offered to take for her. I do believe he thought he was the most magnanimous man in this country at that moment; and was himself astonished that he did not complain of her conduct or say hard things of her dead husband. Not that I quarrel with him on that account; the dear departed would have had none of my tears, if they had been asked for. And you should have seen Sir Anthony's splendid air when he announced to her that he should now give her the same allowance that she had before her marriage; as if she had condoned everything now by burying that wretch.'

Janie stopped suddenly, and her pale face showed a little colour.

'Please, Mr. Lindsay, you won't think me cruel! Phil says I am unwomanly. But you don't know—and he doesn't know—what poor Sabie has suffered. Not that she

shows much trace of it—oh no. Oh, you must not think that at all,' said Janie, earnestly. 'She may be a little grave in manner; but—but—you must rather think of her as she was the night of your supper-party—you remember? —only not dressed like that; for I think she is pinching and saving hard on account of the boy. I assure you, Sabie is just as beautiful as ever—a little paler perhaps; and you remember the splendid hair; and the sweet mouth; and the way she walked, as if all the world were hers. You can't throw that off in a minute; and now, when you find her in a good-humour, and laughing and playing with the boy—well, it's just beautiful to look at! I do wish you could see her!'

But here again Janie stopped suddenly, conscious of indiscretion. He sat silent for a second or two; then he said (not noticing the familiarity), 'I will tell you the truth, Janie. I went away to America hoping to forget a good deal. Yes, I thought that was natural. I had no complaint to make; I had no bitter memories to carry with me; no, it was rather many, many kindnesses that I had to remember, if I remembered anything; but at all events I expected to forget what I wanted to forget; and if anybody had said to me that I should come back married, I should have answered that I did not think so, but that it was not in the least impossible. I have been away about two years and a half. It is not a very long time, perhaps; but I have had the chance of seeing a great many people; and I have had long spells of solitude and reflection. Well, I am more than ever convinced that there is but the one woman in the world for me—no, stop a moment,' he said calmly, for he could not but see that her eyes had flashed with pride and pleasure: 'don't imagine I am going to rush in the moment there is no longer any obstacle, and ask her to marry me. I don't think I ever did actually ask her to marry me; though, I suppose, she guessed. No; what I say is, there is now, and must always be for me, but the one woman in the world; only it is for her to choose what relationship should exist between us; and I will abide by that. If she would rather be my sister—my companion—my friend, good; let it be so. But if I am to be her friend,

I must claim the privileges of a friend; and you seem to think she is not so well off as she might be. Well, I did not spend very much during these two or three years in America—the Scotch are a penurious race, you know; and I got through a good deal of work. What do you say, now: will you find out how I can help her?'

'How can I?—but—but—but the first thing for you is to go and see her!' said Janie, rather wildly. 'Mr. Lindsay, when Phil comes home with the parcels, will you take them with you, and go down to-morrow to Witstead? It would be an excuse. I want you to see Sabie!'

'No,' he said slowly. 'Not yet. I must think over how I am to meet her.'

At this moment Janie's husband was heard at the front door; and presently he entered with his bundles of toys. After a few words, he carried Lindsay off to his studio, no doubt anxious for a little encouragement; and so Janie was left alone in the front part of the house. Her brain was in a whirl. She was prophesying all kinds of beautiful things for her beloved Sabie. The rescuer had come. Andromeda was to have her chains dashed off at last. And again and again there rang through her head the lines—

Sir David Lindsay of the Mount,
Lord Lyon King at Arms,

as if that heroic couplet could in any way be made to refer to one of the Lindsays of Carnryan, who, besides, was but a mere nineteenth-century landscape-painter, recently come home from America with a few dollars in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXXVI

NEW QUARTERS

'AND this is what they call the jocund morn,' Walter Lindsay remarked to himself, as he was leisurely dressing by gas-light. It was about nine o'clock. Outside, the great world of London lay steeped in a heavy and slumberous fog, dense, immovable, mysterious, with here and there a black ghost passing through the saffron-hued darkness. And yet he did not complain over much. There were other and more cheerful visions before his eyes. He was about to take a little run down into Surrey, just to recall what an English winter was like in the country; and it was quite possible that he might be led into making a series of water-colour studies—extending over several months, indeed—if only he could find convenient quarters.

Nor did he at all seek to conceal from himself that his main purpose in going down into the country was that he might perhaps have Sabina for neighbour. No; on the contrary, he strove to persuade himself that he should approach her without any anxiety or misgiving whatever. Why should there be any embarrassment? He would have nothing to do with trembling hopes and fears. It was for Sabina herself to decide what their relationship should be —of the simplest, if so she wished it. But she could hardly refuse him her friendship. She would not turn away from him without a reason. And it would be a very pleasant thing for him to know that this beautiful sister and companion—or acquaintance, even, if she preferred that—was not more than an hour or two's walk away. Perhaps she would give him a cup of tea as he passed. They might

meet at church of a Sunday morning, and stroll homeward together. He could leave little presents for the boy, or illustrated papers and magazines for herself, or a basket of fruit, perhaps, got down from Covent Garden. Sister and friend, if so she wished it: he was content. And so he looked forward to meeting Sabina with equanimity and a light heart.

During the morning matters outside mended somewhat; the fog grew gradually thinner; and by the time he issued forth, the sun was actually visible—appearing like a small Hispano-Moresque plate in an atmosphere of opaque milky-white. It was a long way across London to Waterloo Station; when he reached that hollow-resounding place, with its cold platforms and shivering porters, there was even a faint suggestion of blue in the sky; he was now secure of a bright day for his first dip into Surrey.

He had made up his mind that on this occasion he would not seek to see Sabina. He would merely have a look round the neighbourhood, to discover whether it would suit his purpose. His own dim recollection of it was that it was pretty flat—heathy commons, ponds, scattered villages, and so forth. But in any case there was more variety a little way farther to the south—by Box Hill and Mickleham Downs; and then again it was atmospheric effects he was aiming at rather than pronounced landscape. Frosty moonlight nights, snow-scenes, wan wintry sunrises, and the like—these were what he was after; he could afford, in this series of studies at least, to dispense with the conventionally picturesque. And if he did happen to meet Sabina on this journey of exploration, of course he would speak to her. She would hardly be surprised. It was a landscape-painter's business to be about the country in all seasons. He would tell her his aims. And she would understand that his choice of this neighbourhood was dictated chiefly by the fact of there being a convenient little hotel at Burford Bridge, which would afford him excellent headquarters.

But still—still—as the train jogged on its way through the wintry English landscape—with its irregular little fields and tall hedges, its dank raw greens and reds, its pale

sunshine and vaporous distances—he began to be less convinced that he should meet Sabina in this easy and matter-of-fact fashion. There were some things he could not quite forget. He could not forget how, in former days, when Sabina made her appearance—whether at the top of the stairs at the Royal Academy, or alighting from her cab in front of his own house, or as he casually encountered her in Kensington High Street—there was a kind of bewilderment caused by the straightforward look of her clear, beautiful, bland eyes. He could not forget the glamour of her presence as she sat beside him at the supper-table, the charm of her smile, the mystic fascination of her voice, and his own desperate anxiety to be kind to her, and to entertain her in every possible way. Things were changed, it is true. Then she was the admired of all—radiant, and beautiful, and queenly; conferring favour by the mere touch of her hand; bringing with her an atmosphere of light and happiness and sunshine whithersoever she went: now she was solitary, and apart from friends, and a widow. And then he remembered—in these rather wistful reveries, as he sat and looked out on the ever-changing wintry landscape—that Monna Giovanna was a widow when at last Federigo won her love. But then Monna Giovanna was rich and had everything to give; whereas Federigo, when he had sacrificed his falcon for her sake, had parted with the last of his possessions. And then again he recalled Janie's often-repeated saying, 'There is but the one way of winning Sabie's love, and that is through her pity.' He was in no promising case, then? In honest truth, he could not compassionate himself about anything. He was in the best of health, with the years still lying lightly on his shoulders; he had won for himself a position as an artist which he considered quite commensurate with his merits; he was of good descent; he had more money than met his needs; he had lots of friends. He knew of no particular reason why he should be pitied; except, perhaps, that he had the misfortune to be very much in love with a woman—and even in that direction he did not struggle hard with his fate.

'Witstead.'

The sudden sound startled him out of these reveries;

and involuntarily and quickly he glanced round the little platform. But there was no one going away by the train; and he was the only person who alighted; when he had given up his ticket and passed through the small building, he found himself alone, with the road lying before him towards the village.

And here he paused, in dire uncertainty, almost in fear. It was one thing to think of Sabina when he was three or four thousand miles away; it was another to find himself almost within a stone's-throw of her, so that any moment he might find himself confronted by her startled eyes. If only he could at once go forward and take her hand and say, 'Dear friend, don't be alarmed. It is true I have come to see you—to be near you. But I will vex you with no importunities. You shall be my sister, if you wish it—my sister and friend; and I will ask you to let me see you occasionally, and to help you in any way that may arise.' But would not these very explanations be embarrassing—nay, impossible? And now he wished he had gone on to Burford Bridge; and remained there until the arrival of his painting materials. He had not even a note-book and pencil with him to make pretence, supposing he were suddenly to meet Sabina, and have to tell his tale. And what if she were to resent his coming thus unannounced and uninvited? He began to think it would be better for him to avoid Witstead; there would be some other route by which he could make his way to Burford Bridge.

And yet an overpowering fascination of curiosity drew him on, bit by bit, towards the village. He regarded the most trivial things around him with the keenest interest. This road, now—crisp and hard it was in the grip of the frost, and the ruts made by the cart-wheels were gleaming white with ice—this was the road Sabina would come along each time she went to London. And of course she would be quite familiar with all these things—the wintry hedges, the wide stretch of common, with its patches of dark-green gorse, the pond now ruffled into silver by a slight wind from the north. And still he went on, with an eye cast well forward. If only he could see her cottage, then he would go away content. But how was he to make

out which of these straggling houses was hers? He met no one, and so could not ask. As he drew nearer, he could see two or three small children playing about; otherwise the main thoroughfare seemed quite deserted; for although there were two heavily-laden wains in front of the Checkers, the drivers had gone inside. Finally, after a moment's hesitation, he took heart of grace, walked boldly forward, crossed the road, and entered the inn.

He was received by the daughter of the house, a pretty, buxom, blue-eyed little wench, who seemed to regard the tall, bronzed, black-eyed stranger with much and evident favour. For not only did she politely invite him into the bar-parlour, but she offered him a newspaper, and poked up the fire for him; and when she brought him the ale and biscuits and cheese he had ordered (in the meantime she had snatched a moment to look at her hair, and arrange her smart little cuffs), she seemed quite willing to wait and be asked questions, which she answered smilingly and graciously. And this led to a notable discovery.

'Oh yes, it is a very quiet neighbourhood,' she was saying; and then she added, with a little laugh, 'But it wasn't last week. You know we got our man in, sir.'

'No, I didn't know,' he said—though he suspected, from certain damaged placards he had seen, that there had been a county election recently. 'I have been away from England for two or three years, and have just come back.'

'Have you indeed, sir!' she exclaimed, as if that were a very remarkable occurrence.

'And who was the lucky candidate?' he continued.

'Sir Tyrrell Drake, sir.'

'Oh really,' he said, with some surprise. 'Well, he is a good man.'

'He is a very kind gentleman—he is very much liked about here,' she said pleasantly.

'But you don't mean that he is still at Beaver Court?—I thought he had taken it for only a season or two, for the shooting.'

'He has bought the Court, sir. Oh yes, that was about eighteen months ago, I think.'

'Really!' he said; and for a minute or two the amiable young lady's volunteered information about Beaver Court and its connection with local politics received remarkably small attention. His mind was off on a rapid little trip. Of course Sabina would be known to the clergyman of the parish; of course the clergyman would be known to the owner of Beaver Court, which was one of the great houses in the neighbourhood; Lindsay had become very friendly with this Sir Tyrrell Drake through meeting him at more than one shooting-box in Scotland; and so what more simple than to have conveyed to Sabina in this way the information that he was established at Burford Bridge, and that there would be nothing remarkable if she should happen to meet him? She would be prepared. There would be no danger of startling her. Their friendship would be resumed in an easy and natural way; it would be no matter for wonder if he called upon her, and took the little presents for the boy.

When he had paid his shot, and was about to leave, he said to the gracious and friendly handmaiden, 'Do you happen to know a Mrs. Foster who lives about here?'

'Indeed I do, sir,' was the instant answer. 'The poor dear lady is very lonely now; she is a widow now, perhaps you know, sir?'

'Yes,' he said absently. And then he added: 'Is her house in the village, or outside?'

'If you step into the road, I will show you.'

He followed her, and she pointed out to him the cottage, which stood somewhat apart from the rest of the place, with a bit of ground in front, and apparently a larger space of garden behind. He was rather glad that he could go on his way without passing the cottage; but he stood looking at it—until, indeed, he was recalled to his senses by the young lady of the inn saying to him, 'Good-morning, sir, and thank you!'

'Oh, good-morning, and thank you very much!' he said—and therewith she tripped into the hostelry, with just one brief, swift, and perhaps casual glance, from the doorstep, at the handsome stranger who was now walking briskly away southward.

And he was well content that now he knew the actual and veritable house that held Sabina; and he was glad to be in the neighbourhood; and whenever chance brought him that way, he would know the precise spot that his eyes would seek for. Indeed, so well satisfied was he with his morning's work that, as he got farther and farther down into the country, he began to devote his mind to other things, and to have a look about him for possible subjects. To an ordinary observer there was not much that was promising; for although there was a perfectly cloudless sky overhead, and the pale December sunlight was flooding the land, wintry desolation was too apparent, the woods were leafless, the trees nearer at hand looked black. That is to say, to an ordinary observer the trees might have looked black; but to the trained eye of a landscape-painter there is nothing black in the country—except the rooks; as regarded these very trees, he was noting with delight the golden-green of their stems on the sunward side, and the beautiful deep rose-purple of their spreading masses of branches and twigs. Indeed, for him there was no lack of colour anywhere. There was the ruddy bronze of the fallen beech-leaves; there was the dull yellow of the foliage of the scrub-oak; there was the sparkling green of ivy and laurel, and the heavier green of the firs; the tall hedges were starred with the red or purple-red berries of the hawthorn, the wild-rose, and the yew; here and there the high banks were hanging with the silvery-gray fluff of the wild clematis. Oh, yes, he should have plenty of employment. There were greater things than these to tax his skill. The ever-changing heavens would present him with their slow-moving transformations, from the lonely splendour of the dawn to the mystery of the coming night; the snow and the frost would be his companions; the moonlit woods would have secrets to reveal. And he was especially fortunate in this, that the public were very good to him, and did not grumble when he would insist on doing his work in his own way. He might be as patient and faithful and minute as he chose—or as elusive and subtle and faintly suggestive—and they did not complain. Doubtless they knew they could get chromo-lithographs elsewhere.

When he got down to Box Hill, he first of all had a look round the neighbourhood, and saw there what—with a little straining of conscience—served to confirm him in his purpose. Then he proceeded to the Burford Bridge Hotel, and managed to secure what seemed to him very snug and comfortable rooms. And finally he ascertained that Sir Tyrrell Drake was then living at Beaver Court; though they could not tell him whether Sir Tyrrell had got through his pheasant-shooting of the year. The fact is, Lindsay, though he had now to say, 'For I must to the greenwood go,' had no thought of going as 'a banished man.' He expected to spend the time very pleasantly in this retreat; and if his work should hold him mainly bound to these more southern regions, still, there were Sundays and other occasional holidays when a little trip northward would afford him relaxation. If only that first meeting were well over! In the meanwhile he walked on to Reading, and took train back to London; anxious to get his preparations made as soon as possible, and himself installed in these new quarters. In a couple of days' time, he thought, he should be established at Burford Bridge.

CHAPTER XXXVII

TOGETHER

EVENTUALLY, as it proved, it was the merest chance that threw him in Sabina's way. On the afternoon of his leaving London for the country, when his painting-gear had been packed and put on the top of a hansom, he drove to Victoria Station. The place was busy and thronged; for it wanted but two days to Christmas; and it was with an idle and yet interested curiosity that he stood and watched the holiday-folks while the porter was getting down his things from the cab. At this moment an omnibus was driven up; and about the first person to alight was a tall young woman, dressed simply in black and partially veiled, who was carrying some parcels in her hand. Now any woman who was young and tall attracted his notice; it was a habit he had fallen into; but the moment he set eyes on this black-draped figure, his heart jumped. Nay, as she stepped across the outer platform and entered the ticket-office, his wild conjecture became a certainty—how could he mistake that graceful, easy walk, and the unconsciously proud set of the head? Instantly he followed her—uncertain what to do or say—determined only not to let her out of his sight. She passed through the crowded ticket-office and went leisurely across the platform towards the bookstall. He caught a side-glimpse of her face—and a thrill of joy and wonder and almost of fear flashed [illegible] Indeed there was Sabina—her very self, [illegible] but as beautiful as ever; he might [illegible] soft, golden-brown hair, that the [illegible] only served partially to conceal

'Mrs. Foster!' he said rather breathlessly.

She turned sharply and suddenly, with a frightened look on her face; but she recognised him almost at once; and then she gave him her hand in a somewhat hesitating manner.

'How do you do?' she said. 'I heard you had come back to England. I saw Janie this afternoon.'

'I—I am afraid I startled you,' he said.

'It was the strange voice—that was all,' she answered; and now she was speaking with perfect self-composure.

'Let me carry your things for you,' he said.

'No, thank you, they are quite light. Merely some little presents for two or three children I know.'

'Shall I get you your ticket?'

'I have a return, thank you.'

It seemed so extraordinary to be standing here talking to Sabina about these commonplace trifles, just as if he had bade her good-bye yesterday in Kensington Square. And after that first brief shock of surprise, she appeared to be quite calm and collected; it was he who was rather bewildered and breathless and anxious to talk about a great many things at once. For he remembered Janie's hint. The past was past; and there was an understood compact that it should lie buried and forgotten. It was the things of the present he had to talk about, in this interval of waiting for the train; except, indeed, when Sabina was so kind as to ask him about his travels, or his intentions as regarded the future.

He left her for a moment to look after his luggage; and then these two went down the platform together to the train —a strikingly handsome couple, as one or two of the by-[illegible] appeared to think. The young widow was neatly dressed [illegible]; Lindsay, at least, was sure that black became her [illegible], and her soft-braided, sun-brown hair.

[illegible] and friendly way, and

'[illegible]' he said, with evident surprise. 'You [illegible], don't you? Well, I am for Burford [illegible] same train.'

'I am going third-class,' she said simply, and then she added, with a smile, 'You know, I have to be very economical nowadays.'

'You always were very economical,' he answered quickly. 'And I am going third-class too. Economy! You don't know what is expected of us poor artists. I am afraid to walk along the streets with a decent hat on my head.'

'Why?'

'Why? In case any of the art-critics should see me.'

He could not explain at the moment. He had to get his paraphernalia stowed into the farther end of a third-class carriage; and then he asked her to step in; and then he turned to the guard who was coming along.

'Look here, guard, I have a lot of breakable things here that I don't want moved. I suppose you can keep the compartment for us?'

A couple of half-crowns slipped into the guard's hand accompanied this inquiry; the next minute he was seated in the carriage, with the door locked; and he was alone with Sabina. In order to remove any embarrassment, he took up his parable again—lightly, cheerfully, discursively, as if talking to her were the most ordinary and natural thing in the world.

'But it isn't because we are poor that we artists ought to practise economy; oh no; the cry against us is that we are all so wealthy and purse-proud and prosperous. That is why English art is in its decadence. Did you know that English art was in its decadence?'

'I should not have said so—not in landscape, any way,' she added with a touch of flattery.

'But it is. You see, art always is in its decadence, according to contemporary critics. Very well, then; they have to find a reason for it; and the reason at present is that in England artists are paid too well. They live in comfortable houses; buy *bric à brac*; their wives wear satins and silks; therefore the pampered sons of fortune can't paint. If they cared for their art—if they cared for anything but money and profusion and display—they would go and live the life that Millet lived——'

'J. F. Millet, you mean?' she asked—though she judged by his manner that he was only talking to amuse her.

'Yes. As if Millet painted well simply because he was a singularly unlucky man, and was badly treated; or as if he wouldn't have lived a very different life if he had had the chance. But take the other side of the question. If being paid for one's work—if living in a decent house—or even being received at court—is destructive of the artist's aims, how did Vandyke and Rubens and Velasquez manage to paint at all? You don't suppose that Titian starved, or Raphael, or Michael Angelo. Turner did not die a pauper. Sir Joshua Reynolds painted some passable things, too, though he did not live in a garret. Well, you know, all that is the Grub Street notion of the arts. And yet I am not sure that Grub Street has done so much, after all. Shakespere didn't live there—he bought houses, and land, and tithes. Milton didn't live there; nor Pope, nor Dryden, nor Wordsworth, nor Byron, nor Shelley, nor Scott. Indeed I am not so certain that our critics, who exhort us to live in a garret, and cultivate literature and painting on a little oatmeal—I am not quite certain that they live there themselves. On the press-day at the Academy, I know I have seen more than one brougham drive into the courtyard of Burlington House. Now that's wrong. That is very wrong. If a man's work goes to the dogs when he gets well paid, how about a critic in a brougham? But perhaps they don't think it matters much what becomes of criticism; and so they may have their houses in Kensington, their boxes at the play, their fine dinner-parties, while we are ordered off to make water-colour drawings at forty francs a piece, or else be denounced as traitors to our art, and hucksters, and panderers to fashion. It's a little hard though, isn't it?'

'They would be quite pleased to see you as you are now,' Sabina said, with a smile, 'in a third-class railway carriage.'

'Yes,' he said. 'I must manage to have it put in the papers—they put everything in the papers nowadays.'

However, there was not much of serious malice in this mock complaint of his; for indeed the critics had been very kind to him, as far as he knew; and sometimes had even

gone out of their way, in their usual pessimistic wail, to make of him an especial exception, as one whose work showed undeviating high purpose. It was merely the first subject that had suggested itself on his getting into this third-class carriage; it served its purpose of removing any restraint between Sabina and himself; and by the time he had completed a whimsical contrast between the lot of a critic in London, living in luxury, frequenting his clubs, gossiping through Private Views, and perhaps even seated at the Royal Academy banquet, and the lot of a poor devil of an artist in the Canadian wilds, with half-frozen fingers cooking his own meals and sleeping at night in a shivering tent,—by the time he had put these two people before her, and sought to enlist her sympathy on behalf of one of them, they were rattling away down into Surrey, with the dusk of the December afternoon stealing gradually over the land.

In his heart he thanked Janie. It was ever so much more satisfactory to be talking about the merits of English portrait-painting than to be offering sham condolences; and Sabina showed that she was not at all shocked by his apparent callousness, for she was most friendly and pleasant towards him. That was until they reached Witstead; there her manner changed. For now the dusk had deepened; and of course he said that he would get out there and escort her home—making his own way to Burford Bridge on foot; and he was a little surprised that she should so earnestly ask him not to think of such a thing.

'Oh, but I must insist,' he said. 'What, do you think I am going to let you walk away alone through the dark?'

'I assure you I am quite used to it,' she pleaded. 'Please don't let me put you about so. Do you know how many miles it is to Burford Bridge?'

'Yes, I know very well. Here, guard!'

'Yes, sir.'

'When you get to Burford Bridge, just give those things to the station-master, will you, and tell him I will send for them this evening.'

'Very well, sir.'

'Of course, when she saw that he was determined, she forbore to protest any further; and she relinquished to him

the parcels she was carrying; then they set forth together, along the desolate road and through the ever-deepening and darkening twilight. He did not walk fast—though Sabina was a notable walker, and liked brisk exercise. He wished this solitary way were thrice as long. And it was so strange to find himself alone in the world with her, as it were, in the silence of the night, with one or two stars just becoming faintly visible through the thin mist that lay all around them. Now and again a parcel that he carried would touch her dress. That was being close enough to Sabina. That was not like being some three or four thousand miles away, half-dreaming, over a camp-fire, of England and of a woman's face set round about with an aureole of golden-brown hair, and shining with benignant eyes. And he wondered why Sabina had been so anxious that he should not walk with her from the station. Did she wish him not to see how small the place was in which she now lived? No; that was not like Sabina—who was simplicity itself in such matters. And as if it could matter to him where Sabina lived—in hovel or in palace—so long as she was his friend.

'You will be distributing your presents to-morrow, I suppose?' he said (though the silence and the light sound of her footfall on the frosty road were delightful enough).

'They can hardly be called presents,' she answered simply. 'The fact is, Janie and her husband have sent me down everything that could be imagined for my own little boy; and as I had to be in London I thought I might as well bring some bits of things for a few of the children about. But why to-morrow?'

'You will spend Christmas Day at home?' he said, at a venture.

'Yes, I shall,' she said. 'But you forget—my home is here.'

'I meant London,' he said. 'I thought perhaps you might be going up to your friends—to the Wygrams, for example.'

'No,' she said shortly. 'I am not going anywhere at present. And you—where shall you be?'

He could not help smiling—though she did not see. For well he recognised the old abrupt manner—the straightforward frankness that used to startle him a little bit some

times. And highly pleased was he to find her placing him on the old friendly footing.

'Oh, I?' he said. 'Well, one or two people have been so kind as to take pity on a forlorn bachelor; and I was thinking of going to the house where there were the most children—for they make the fun of Christmas; but, do you know, I really think I shall stay at Burford Bridge.'

'Christmas in a hotel?' she said. 'Won't you find that very lonely?'

'Loneliness and I have been pretty constant companions since I left England,' said he, 'and we manage to get on very well together. We're on the best of terms, and hardly ever tire of each other. But if I should find Burford Bridge just a trifle too dull on Christmas Day, I may walk over and call on you for a quarter of an hour. You know, I want to make the acquaintance of your little boy.'

She answered neither yes nor no; and it was too dark for him to see by her face how she took his proposal. Presently she said rather slowly, 'I think, if I were you, I would accept one of those invitations. It hardly seems English-like to spend Christmas in a hotel. And there must be many of your friends delighted to welcome you after so long an absence.'

'Oh, I think I shall keep to Burford Bridge,' he said cheerfully, 'if I don't put the good people about. I should be a stranger, now, if I went to any one's house. I shall do very well by myself.'

They were arrived at the front gate of the little cottage.

'Well, whether you go up to town or not,' she said, 'I wish you a Merry Christmas.'

He took her hand.

'I wish you a Merry Christmas, and many, many, many happy New Years.'

Perhaps there was just a trace of too much earnestness in this speech, for she somewhat distantly said, 'Good-night. I am sure your friends must be glad to see you looking so well.'

And then he shut the little gate; and also bade her good-night; and directly afterwards was making off to the southward as fast and as joyfully as he could go—his foot-

steps sounding sharply on the hard road, a dim mist hanging all around, the Pleiades overhead showing merely as a small faint patch of silver haze, a large planet burning more clearly in the south.

Then there was dinner in the comfortable little hotel; and there were big logs piled on the fire of his sitting-room; and his pipe was lit; and there were visions there —not in the least of a mournful character. His mind was going back over many things—the evenings of former years; and he wondered if she sometimes recalled them too. And most of all he lamented that he had no keep-sake or souvenir of these happy nights, as linking her memory of them with his. The only thing he possessed that was associated with Sabina was the chalice of rock-crystal out of which she had sipped to please him; and he thought he would have that brought down for Christmas Day—not to drink out of, but to grace his solitary table. If only she had given him some small trinket in these far-off days! A rose, even, at Mrs. Mellord's ball: he would have had the leaves embalmed in a small gold casket, that he could have attached to his watch-chain. That was the night she had come into the hall as if in a cloud of radiant white; that was the night she had gone with him into the half-lit supper-room, with its festoons and beds of roses, and had lain lazily back in her chair, with the one diamond in her necklet flashing from time to time as she breathed. Or perhaps he would have been more fortunate if he had prayed for some token of remembrance on the evening she spent at his own house? She was more than kind and complaisant that night—as they sat at table together. He remembered some verses of a ballad of his own country—of his own county, indeed—

'O dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
When we sat at the wine,
How we changed the napkins frae our necks?
It's no sae lang sin syne.

And yours was gude, and gude enough,
But no sae gude as mine;
For yours was o' the cambrick clean,
But mine o' the silk sae fine.

And dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
As we twa sat at dine;
How we changed the rings frae our fingers,
And I can show thee thine?

And yours was gude, and gude enough,
Yet no sae gude as mine,
For yours was o' the red, red gold,
But mine o' the diamond fine.'

Cambric or silk, gold or diamond, it would have mattered little to him what this trinket might be, if only Sabina had given it to him, as a pledge of remembrance. And here now was Christmas come—when friendly gifts and souvenirs were permitted according to common custom. From her to him?—that was hardly to be thought of. From him to her?—well that was matter for long and cheerful consideration, as the yellow logs and roots blazed up in tongues of crimson fire, and his pipe was lit again and again, and the slow half-hours crept on.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

'O' BYGANE DAYS AND ME'

EARLY next morning he was off and up to London; and he made straight for Covent Garden, and for a florist's shop there. There were two or three men about the place, and a young lady behind the counter; and naturally he turned to the young lady behind the counter, as likely to be more sympathetic and obliging.

'I want you to make me up a basket of flowers,' said he.

'If you please. About what price?' said the young lady, with amiable eyes.

'Ah, we'll talk about that later on,' he answered. 'You see, I want it arranged according to my own fancy. I am an artist—like yourself; and this time you will let me have my own way about the colours.'

'Oh, certainly, sir—of course. Will you tell me what flowers you would like?' she said politely.

He took a chair, and sat down at the counter; tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and began to draw some lines with his pencil.

'I see you have in the window all the flowers that would be necessary. Well, then, I want you to take a circular basket—a pretty big one—yes, that will do—and line it with green moss, leaving the moss to be the outside ring—so. Then comes a circle of white hyacinths—say about that breadth proportionately. Then comes a circle of those red tulips—a single line of them. Then comes a broader circle of white camellias. Now for the centre: the centre is to be entirely of heart's-ease—nothing else. Do you understand?'

'Oh yes. I think it will be very pretty,' she was good enough to say.

'I think it will.'

And then, having given her strict injunctions about choosing the freshest and choicest blossoms, and about the careful packing of the basket, he turned to the proprietor of the shop. He wanted a box of fruit made up—as large as one could conveniently carry — the contents, white grapes, black grapes, pine-apples, and the like. Could these two packages be sent by a certain hour to Victoria Station? He would be there to receive them and pay the messenger. When all this had been satisfactorily settled, he bade good-morning to the pleasant-eyed young lady, got into the hansom again, and drove off to his studio at Notting Hill.

As he had left home but the previous day, there were no letters to be answered, nor further instructions to be given to his housekeeper; his only business was to get out from a cabinet the rock-crystal cup which was the sole souvenir of a certain memorable night. And so, when he had got down to Victoria, and was on his journey back to Burford Bridge, he was bearing with him three packages; one, a basket of flowers for Sabina (surely at such a time she could not refuse so simple a present?); the second, a box of fruit for the little boy (he hoped he had not erred in his selection—but grapes were innocent enough, anyway); and the third, a crystal chalice, set round about with uncut stones, which was to adorn his Christmas dinner-table, and perhaps, in his solitude, act as a magic talisman to call up long bygone scenes (as if it were so difficult for him to summon back the well-remembered evenings on which he and Sabina had been together!)

However, when he got down to Burford Bridge, his conscience began to smite him a little. What was he in this part of the country for? He was a landscape-painter —with his work to do in the world. And if it was as yet useless for him to unstrap his sketching implements, at least he ought to be looking about the neighbourhood for possible subjects. And so, when he had obtained a snack of late luncheon, he went wandering carelessly out and

along the road—over the bridge that spans the sluggish Mole.

To tell the truth, things did not look very promising on this short and bleak December afternoon; but, by turning his back on the now westering sun, he managed to get what colour was going. There, for example, was a strip of golden-yellow fence; over that the green stems of some leafless trees; and then, behind and above those trees, the dusky height of Box Hill, mostly of a misty indigo-blue, with touches of russet and dark-green here and there, and here and there a series of pinky-gray scaurs. He walked on. There was a suggestion in some coldly-white horses in a dank green field, with a coppery sun just sinking behind a hill—the hill in pale blue shadow. Again he walked on. Somehow his work did not seem to interest him much this afternoon. It was Christmas time, after all. There was an unsettling sense of hope and elation in the air. He wondered if to-morrow would be fine and clear and bright; he was going to take Sabina her flowers. All over England that afternoon families were being brought together—some of the members from distant places enough; the Christmas *Schwärmerei* was already being blown into flame; he thought of the many, many happy households. Yes; and of the household of the young widow—who would be solitary enough to-night in that little cottage. But to-morrow? She might be kind to her one visitor? She could hardly refuse the flowers.

It is a most remarkable circumstance that on this same afternoon, just as the gases were being lit, Santa Claus made his appearance in the streets of the small town of Dorking, in actual and bodily shape, though in a guise not ordinarily attributed to him. The story was told by a very considerable number of children; and as on all the substantial points it was identical, it may safely be credited. They said that as they were looking into this or that newly-lit shop-window, some one from behind tapped them on the shoulder; and that, turning, they saw a tall man—some of them called him a gentleman, but that is hardly the phrase to apply to Santa Claus—brown-faced and black-eyed, who said, 'Go in and buy something,' and put in the hand of each of them a coin.

In the surprise that followed the stranger vanished; but there was the undoubted white thing—apparently a shilling—in the palm of their hand. It appeared that most of them were for going home to ask their people if it was real; but that here and there a youngster more intrepid than the rest adventured into this or that shop and asked for a pennyworth of something; and not only came out again to show his companions his purchase, but could produce an obvious and unmistakable elevenpence of change to convince the most hesitating mind. Meanwhile, what had become of Santa Claus? Why, he had gone into the White Horse Hotel, and was drinking a cup of tea in the bar, and asking the landlord where and when was the next meet of foxhounds in that neighbourhood; for he said he had been away from England for some little time; and now that he had come back, he thought there was nothing in the old country he could see more English-looking and picturesque and inspiriting than a run with the foxhounds on a clear December day.

Lindsay's hope for the morrow was not belied. A fairer Christmas dawn never widened up and over the county of Surrey; and already he was on the top of Box Hill, whither he had climbed before breakfast, despite the clammy and slippery and difficult chalk. The red sun rose behind heavy cloud-banks of saffron-brown, lying low along the horizon; but over these the eastern heavens were of a clear and lambent lemon-yellow, paling into a pearly-gray. And there was a kind of rejoicing in the soul in looking abroad over the wide landscape, with its fields, and hedges, and farmsteads, and church-spires, and here and there a tuft of blue smoke rising into the still air. Well he knew what was happening in those scattered country houses, half-hidden among the leafless trees. The children were examining with delight and awe the mysterious fairy packages that had been left for them overnight at the nursery door; the young folk were careering down the stairs, to search the pile of cards and letters on the hall-table; the older people were still lying half-dozing and half-dreaming of former days; perhaps somewhere—among the laurel-bushes—or by the garden gate—there was a lover regarding a high

window, and ready with a kiss to be thrown upward from eager finger-tips. '*Wæs-heil!*' this solitary spectator could have called to the wide, awakening land. For he was glad to be at home again, to be in his own country once more.

The first train after morning church took him to Witstead; then he walked along the hard, wintry road towards the village, carrying the two packages with him. He was hardly apprehensive as to how she should receive him; this was the season for the meeting of friends; it was the universal custom to offer little gifts at such a time; she would take from him so simple a thing as a basket of flowers.

He stopped at the little gate and rang the bell: the maid came to the door.

'Is Mrs. Foster at home?' he said—not anxiously.

'Yes, sir.'

'Can I see her for a moment or two?'

'Step inside, sir, and I'll ask. What name, sir?'

The next moment he had followed the little maid into the house, and was in Sabina's parlour. He put the fruit and flowers on the table—removing the wrappers. And then he glanced about the place.

It was a strange kind of drawing-room for the daughter of Sir Anthony Zembra to have. Doubtless there were many small neatnesses here and there—which he attributed to Sabina's own hand; but the furniture was cheap and showy; the pretentious British upholsterer had been allowed to do his worst. For a moment he thought of what a labour of love it would be if he were to begin the construction and beautifying of a house—somewhere on Campden Hill, for choice—with some remote hope of her one day entering it as mistress. And while the builder was at work, he would be away abroad—at Tunis, at Cairo, at Smyrna—ransacking the bazaars for rugs, and hangings, and tiles, and brass-work, and what not, for the proper decoration of her home. He knew of some sixteenth-century silk embroideries he had seen in Venice—there was an alabaster chimney-piece he had nearly brought home from Genoa, though it would have been something in the nature of a white elephant——

'Please, sir,' said the little maid, at the door, 'missis's compliments, and she will be down in a moment.'

Then she went away; but she could only have gone into the neighbouring apartment, for he could distinctly hear her humming an air that was strangely familiar to him. And then he remembered. Why, this was the familiar old air with which his mother had many and many a time hushed him to sleep. And where had this small maid picked it up? From her mistress? Had Sabina, then, heard some Scotch mother sing—

O can ye sew cushions,
And can ye sew sheets?

Now that he thought of it, he was not quite sure that Janie had not mentioned it in one of her letters.

The door opened, and Sabina appeared. She seemed pale, reserved, and serious beyond her wont; she was leading her little boy by the hand.

'You wished to see my little boy? Here he is.'

The child was chiefly occupied with a performing monkey in oxidised silver, one of Janie's presents; but he came forward frankly enough. At the same time, and involuntarily, she glanced towards the table.

'I have brought you a few flowers,' said he lightly, 'and also some fruit for this youngster, if it is permitted to him. It will be better for him than sweets, anyway.'

'Oh, thank you very much,' Sabina said; and she went to the table, and bent down her head over the flowers.

Lindsay drew the little fellow towards him: who could doubt that these clear brown eyes were unmistakably Sabina's eyes?

'What is your name?'

'Harry,' the child said, still busy with the monkey.

And Lindsay, looking at those eyes, said to himself, 'Well, my little chap, of course you can't know that in the years to come Carnryan in Galloway will be yours. And you will have to grow up to be a brave man—strong, and honourable, and generous to women—and fit to be the owner of the old tower of Carnryan.'

Sabina came back.

'So you preferred to stay down in the country?' she said.

'Yes.'

'It will be a lonely Christmas evening for you.'

He looked up suddenly, and appealed to her eyes. Was she going to ask him to share her solitude, if only for the briefest time, say for an hour, perhaps, or a couple of hours, as the afternoon faded away to dusk, and the lamps were lit? It seemed so natural a thing! These two isolated creatures, living near to each other; and this being Christmas time, when people are drawn together! But she noticed that look, and instantly her manner became more reserved than ever.

'Harry,' she said quickly, 'you have put that thing wrong again. Come here, and I will set it right for you.'

He knew that he had made a mistake; yet even this momentary slip could not account for the strange coldness, and distance, and reticence of her manner towards him, when he began to talk to her. It was forced on him only too clearly that his presence was an embarrassment to her; when she spoke it was in a formally reserved and courteous way—she who had always been so frank and direct and straightforward. Nevertheless, the charm of the beautiful eyes, the calm forehead, and the proud, sweet mouth—the serious grace and dignity of her every movement and look—the nameless fascination that merely being near her threw over him—kept him there in spite of himself; and also perhaps there was added some remembrance of Sabina's greater kindness to him in the bygone days.

At length he rose to go; and she accompanied him to the door. Then, when she had bade him good-bye—and, indeed, when he was half-way across the little patch of garden—she seemed to relent for a moment.

'Mr. Lindsay!' she said.

He turned.

'I'm afraid I did not half thank you for bringing the fruit to the little boy,' she said, in a hesitating way. 'I—I see so few visitors—don't think me ungrateful——'

'Oh, that is all right,' he said good-naturedly. 'Tell him to look alive and grow up, and I'll buy him a pony.'

Then he bade her farewell again, and went on his way.

And if he was a little comforted by that brief token of compunction (if so it might be considered), he was none the less surprised that Sabina should treat him in so cold a fashion. He had been scrupulous in offering her nothing but the merest friendship. To give her a basket of flowers on Christmas Day was surely no great thing. Why, she had been far more complaisant on their coming down together in the train. And he could not for a moment imagine that Sabina's embarrassment and reserve was owing to her having to receive him in that commonly-furnished room.

He walked away over the hard-frosted country, and round by Headley Hill and Mickleham Downs; and when he got back to Burford Bridge, he found it was almost time for dinner. Then he brought forth the precious cup of rock-crystal, and placed it among the holly-berries with which the good people of the inn had decorated the table. It looked very well there. It would give an air of richness and magnificence to the frugal little banquet. And he thought that whatever became of his other valuables and possessions (as to which he was rather careless, for he had discovered in various distant lands that it was easy to get on without them) this treasure at least should remain his. It would be to him as the golden goblet of the King of Thule. '*Den Becher nicht zugleich.*'

But as he sat at his solitary Christmas dinner, that jewel-studded talisman proved to be, as often it had proved before, an awakener of memories; and all the more he wondered why Sabina, who had been so gracious to him in former days, should be so unfriendly now. Again and again the lines came into his head—

O dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
When we sat at the wine,
We changed our napkins frae our necks?
It's no sae lang sin syne.

Surely it was not so long since then?—and about her having then singled him out for very especial favour there could not be the slightest doubt. And if she could not recall those days, at least he could—to the minutest details

He could remember how more than once, at Mrs. Wygram's, she had left the group who were surrounding her, and crossed the room to talk to him alone. At Mrs. Mellord's ball, at the Private View of the Academy, at the little party in his own house, and on other occasions, she seemed to expect him to devote himself entirely to her, which undoubtedly he had done. And now her coldness of manner, her studied reticence, not only showed that she had forgotten how in all things he had tried to please her, and amuse her, and entertain her—how he had paid her every attention that was possible in the circumstances—but also they seemed to say that for the future she would rather have none of his acquaintance.

He was rather glad to have done with this solitary dinner; and then he lit his pipe, and drew in the comfortable easy-chair to that fire of briskly-blazing logs.

Forthwith (so varying are the moods of men) he began to denounce himself as the most ungrateful scoundrel that ever breathed. What?—was it the very kindness of Sabina towards him in the past that was to be made a weapon of reproach against her now? She had given him everything that the most exacting friendship could demand—so much so that outsiders mistook the relations between them altogether; and these were his thanks! And was it not natural that she should be a little embarrassed by this first and perhaps unexpected visit of his? She had not got accustomed to the notion of his being, as it were, a next-door neighbour. Then she was a young widow, living alone; and people were always ready to talk. As for his unspoken suggestion that he should remain and share her Christmas dinner with her, perhaps that was really of a nature to startle her? And clearly—when he was coming away—she had begun to regret her excessive reserve; and wished to part friends. Things had come to a strange crisis indeed if he could cherish any grudge against Sabina.

No; he would set about his work now, and get on with that; and she would become familiar with the notion of his being in the neighbourhood; and by degrees they might establish the coveted and beautiful relationship of old, if

nothing more. And so he relit his pipe, and piled on more logs and roots; and there grew up before his eyes a picture of Sabina standing on the doorstep, laughing and radiant and happy-eyed, while he led away the youthful Harry from the garden-gate—on the back of a Shetland pony.

CHAPTER XXXIX

NEIGHBOURS

AFTER that day he set resolutely to work; and very cold work it was. But he had long been used to out-of-door exposure; he had a virile physique; and then some unknown friend—whose motive for withholding his name was beyond conjecture—had sent him a kid-leather coat such as is worn in early spring by salmon-fishers in Norway, and there was much warmth and satisfaction in this garment. Nor was he without occasional company. The two daughters of Sir Tyrrell Drake had a couple of young lady friends staying with them at Beaver Court; and the whole four of these girls were, or professed to be, more or less of amateur artists, and keenly interested in painting. It was remarkable how often they had occasion to drive round by Burford Bridge; and if Mr. Lindsay was anywhere visible, they would give the reins to the groom, and would come and form a semicircle round the artist and his easel, devoting themselves chiefly to compliment, but sometimes venturing to ask how this or that was done. Lindsay was in no wise disconcerted by the presence of these friendly critics; he was too well used to the bovine gaze of gaping rustics; but he had to inform them that his studies were mostly memoranda for his own subsequent use, and not at all fitted to be set up as exemplars for innocent and aspiring minds. For the rest, he might have dined every night in the week at Beaver Court; and once or twice he did go over, begging to be excused for his morning dress; but for the most part he liked to be alone with his sketches in the evenings, for there was a good deal of consideration to be done indoors.

However, a landscape-painter, no matter how busy he may be, has always plenty of time for thinking over things; and Lindsay, sitting at his easel on those chill January mornings, began to wonder whether he had ever really understood Sabina. Perhaps the glamour of her appearance, her actual physical beauty, had blinded him? If he had been asked to name what he considered her most marked characteristic, he would have said an extraordinarily frank and ready generosity of disposition. But this Sabina was cold, reticent, distrustful, embarrassed, and at times betraying more than a trace of nervous anxiety. Was it, then, that all women were a mystery: inconsistent, perverse, whimsical, unstable as water? The second time that he went over to Beaver Court, he went with a definite purpose. 'I am going to try to find out what women really are,' he said to himself. But those four light-hearted, merry, wholesome-cheeked English girls did not appear to invite psychological study. Probably they would have called it 'stuff.' They were very kind to him; they played and sang for him; he played and sang for them; and with the assistance of two brothers home from school they had a little romp of 'Sir Roger de Coverley.' One of the girls, indeed, was a tiny and winsome wench of seventeen or eighteen, with soft, kittenish ways, and large, appealing eyes. He suspected that those eyes knew a trifle more than they pretended to know; and that the owner of them, in a quiet corner, might reveal a far from slight acquaintance with the fine art of flirtation. But what of that? They were all of them as school-children to him. They did not interest him. They were merry, and very good-natured, and frank; and they plagued his life out to come to some approaching ball; and they trooped down into the study, and remained there talking, and laughing, and teasing, while he had a final cigar with Sir Tyrrell. Indeed, they were in every way most kind and friendly towards him. But they could not tell him anything about Sabina, who seemed to belong to a different world.

On his rare visits to London he was in the habit of making Witstead his station, just in case he might casually meet her in going or coming. And at last that happened.

He had spent the night in town, and was returning to his work on the following morning. He had passed through the little village without seeing any sign of her; and was walking briskly on, trying to forget the renewed disappointment, when, at some considerable distance ahead of him, he suddenly caught sight of her. He recognised the tall and graceful figure at a glance; all the more that her arm was uplifted and her head thrown back, for apparently she was gathering something from a high hedge that ended a coppice coming right up to the road. On the pathway was a perambulator; but the small Harry was by her side, kneeling at the hedge roots, and no doubt imitating his mother's occupation. As he drew nearer, he heard that she was singing to the child; nearer still, and he could make out the old familiar air; but it was very lightly and cheerfully that she made her complaint—

'The wild wind is ravin',
Thy minnie's heart's sair,
The wild wind is ravin',
And ye dinna care,'

—if that was what she was saying to him. When Lindsay had got quite close to her, she did not turn to see who this was; she merely ceased her singing until the stranger should go by; and then she continued her efforts to get at certain feathery sprays of the wild clematis that were just beyond her reach.

'Let me get them for you,' he said.

She turned quickly; was it ever to be his fate to startle her on their meeting?

'Oh, how do you do, Mr. Lindsay? No, thank you. I think I can manage.'

Of course he saw that she could not manage; and without further parleying he pulled down the slender branches for her, and she took what she wanted. Then they spoke a little about the weather, and the hardships of the poor. Then she asked him how he was getting along at Burford Bridge.

'Isn't it rather unusual for an artist to be painting out-of-doors in weather like this?'

'That makes it all the better worth doing.'

'Don't your fingers get benumbed?'

'Sometimes I have to give up and stamp about. But I can bear cold pretty well.'

'Are you going to take the drawings to America when you have finished them all?'

'No; I think I shall exhibit them in London.'

'I was told you made a great reputation in America.'

'They were very kind to me over there. And of course an artist's work has to be shown before they can know anything about him. One copy of a book is just as good as another; but the painter has to show his own original work.'

'And you are not going back to America?' she said rather absently.

'No, I think not—not at present—I have not even thought of it.'

By this time she had put the bits of holly and the red berries and the sprays of old-man's-beard into the perambulator.

'Come along, Harry,' she said; 'you will have to walk all the way back, you see. Good-morning, Mr. Lindsay!'

So she left him; and he walked on, leaden-hearted enough. He wished he had not seen her. Perhaps he ought to try to see her no more. Surely it would be better for him to light his pipe in front of the fire of an evening, and conjure up the beautiful, bland-eyed Sabina that he used to know, who was so frankly generous in her friendliness towards himself, who was the bepetted and bepraised and beloved of all who knew her. This coldly reticent woman here bore herself with an absolutely defiant ostentation of indifference. She seemed to wonder that he did not return to America. Was she anxious that he should return? No; she was too indifferent to be anxious.

But as he walked up and down the room that night, or stood before the fire and roused the blazing roots with his heel, he fell to having juster and gentler thoughts of Sabina.

'There is something that I don't understand,' he said to himself. 'There must be some explanation of such an extraordinary change of manner; and until I discover what it is, I am not going to quarrel with her. Nor will I allow

her to quarrel with me. I have given her no cause of offence that I can think of. Whatever comes of it, I must see her, and insist on her speaking out, clear and plain. She used to be able to do that, in those former days, without any pleading at all.'

He thought over the matter for two or three days; and then one morning, when he rose to find a chill east wind (that pest of the landscape-painter) filling heaven and earth with a barely perceptible but perfectly hopeless mist, he thought he might as well walk over to Witstead and have this matter out with Sabina. He arrived there about eleven o'clock. The small maidservant who opened the door looked frightened.

'Yes, sir, missis is at home; but you can't see her. There's illness in the house.'

'Who is ill?' he said, quickly.

'The little boy, sir. And it's fever—scarlet fever.'

She made bold to appeal to him about her own trouble.

'And I'm sure I don't want to leave, sir,' the girl said, looking up to him with timid eyes.

'Why should you leave?'

'Mother wants me to. Mother's afraid.'

'Why, you are not going to play the coward at such a time?'

'I'm sure I don't want to go—missis has been so good to me. This is my fourth place; but I've never had a missis like her before.'

'Well, I am going upstairs to see her——'

'Oh, if you please not, sir—it's dreadfully infectious—I was not to allow any one to go up,' the little maid protested.

'Oh, nonsense,' he said quite gently to her. 'Don't you be so frightened as that. I am going up to tell your mistress that you couldn't think of leaving.'

He went upstairs. The carpet had been stripped from the landing; his footfall sounded sharp. From the top of one of the doors there were suspended heavy folds of calico soaked in carbolic acid; he guessed that that was the room; and, removing the curtain an inch or two, he knocked lightly. In a minute or so Sabina appeared.

She did not seem so agitated as he had expected; perhaps it was the sense of danger that had strung her nerves. Nor did she seem surprised at finding him there; while he on his part did not stay to make any apology for his intrusion.

'This is a very bad business,' he said. 'I hope it will turn out to be a mild form of the fever.'

'The doctor seems to think that likely,' she said, with apparent calmness. 'There have been two or three cases in the neighbourhood, and none of them of the most serious kind.'

'Oh, then you may fairly hope for the best,' he said. 'But it will be a terrible imprisonment for you.'

'I shall not grudge it. My boy will have a faithful nurse, I think. And very glad I am now that I served six months in the hospital; I should be terrified if I did not know exactly what to do; I should be afraid of making some dreadful mistake.'

'I wish you could suggest some way in which I could be of assistance to you,' he said.

'Would you mind sending a note to Janie, and explaining to her why I cannot write to her?'

'Oh yes,' he said very eagerly, and very much rejoiced to have Sabina talking to him in this simple, frank, direct way, 'I will do so at once. But I mean that you must promise to consider me entirely at your service—at any hour—for any length of time——'

'Thank you, I think we shall do very well,' Sabina said; but then she added, 'Unless the little girl Elizabeth were to leave. Then—I—should be rather helpless.'

Even in the dusk behind those heavy folds he could see the quick nervous tremor that passed across her lips.

'Oh, that's all right,' he said cheerfully. 'That's all right. You needn't bother about that. The little girl isn't going to leave; but if she wishes to leave, there's no harm done. You see, I am on my way to London just now; and in the afternoon I am going to bring my housekeeper down. She will be no inconvenience to you—she will get a bed over the way at the Checkers. Then in the daytime she will come over here and look after things; or if the

girl chooses to go, then she will step into her place. It is the simplest matter in the world.'

'You are very kind,' Sabina said, in rather a low voice.

'Then as to yourself. Of course you cannot be the sole nurse—unless you want to knock yourself up at the very outset. As soon as I get up to London I will go to one of those institutions and send down a trained nurse. I daresay she might be down to-night.'

'Oh no, pray don't!' she said. 'Indeed I can do the nursing myself——'

'Day and night?—why, it is impossible!' he exclaimed.

'I have a great deal of endurance. And then the expense of having one of those trained nurses, perhaps for a long time, would be so great—really I can get on by myself.'

He had foreseen this question of expenditure.

'As to the cost of having a trained nurse down, or any other cost that may be necessary, you will have nothing to do with that. That is my affair——'

'Mr. Lindsay——' she was going to protest; but he stopped her with a gentleness that was firm as well.

'Do you think you have any right to utter a word of objection? You have no right. The care you have for your child must keep you silent. Besides, I claim the privilege from our old-standing friendship. You have not been so friendly with me of late—I do not know why. I came over this morning to ask; I thought if there was a misunderstanding, it might be removed. But all that is nothing now. It does not need to be spoken of. No; I claim from past days the right to act as your friend; and you will not object to anything I do—you cannot object if you think why it is done.'

Her eyelids had been growing moist; two great tears rolled down her cheeks. She quickly brushed them aside.

'How many rooms have you in there—one or two?' he asked.

She could not answer for a moment; then she said, 'One room and a dressing-room. It is very convenient; I can shut the door behind me when I come out like this.'

'Then the dressing-room will do for the nurse. Well,

I must be off now; I will see you again in the evening. And don't you think of making one word more of protest; and don't have any anxiety—the house will be managed for you all right. There's another thing, mind you keep yourself up; eat and drink well, for that is the best safeguard against catching infection. And fancy what the outlook for your little boy would be if you fell ill yourself. Well, good-bye just now!'

She called him back, and he pretended not to see that she was struggling with an emotion which she could not conceal.

'I—I must not offer you my hand,' she said, in rather a shaky voice, 'and—and I cannot tell you how I thank you; but some day I will——'

'Oh, it is nothing; we are neighbours, you know,' he said lightly, and away he went.

He strode rapidly off to the railway-station, armed with these self-imposed duties, and glad enough to be able to do so much for Sabina. Nay, he would have gone rejoicing 'as a strong man to run a race' but for recurring thoughts of the sick little lad lying in that lonely chamber. Well, what could be done for him should.

Arrived in London, he forthwith arranged about the trained nurse being sent down that evening; then he drove out to Notting Hill and told his housekeeper what he wanted of her, and gave her all the necessary instructions; and then he went along to Janie, with his brief and troubled story.

'And I want you to do me a good turn,' he said to her. 'I think you told me that Sabina took no wine—for economy's sake, I suppose. Now she must. But she won't take it if it isn't there; I mean she won't send for it. Well, I have a hansom outside; will you drive along with me to my wine-merchants, and yourself order some wines, and give her address, and write a note in the office telling her that they are a New Year's present or something of the sort, and insisting on her using the wine, if she means to keep well during this trouble? Of course it will go down to my account.'

'To your account? But what would Phil say if he heard of such a thing?' Janie exclaimed.

'He need not hear of such a thing,' said the tempter.

'Oh yes, I should have to tell him,' the honest Janie rejoined. 'However, Sabie must not be allowed to suffer. I will tell you what I will do. I will go along and order the wine and send it to her and write to her, and then you and Phil can fight as to who is to pay for it.'

'Excellent, most excellent! Come along!' he said at once. And they went out, and he put her into the hansom and drove off towards Piccadilly.

In the wine-merchant's office Janie's choosing was pretty much of a farce; and at last she protested.

'Mr. Lindsay, if you order such expensive wines, Sabie will know quite well that it wasn't I who sent them.'

'How will she know? By the quality of them? Not likely: she is a woman.'

'Then if she doesn't know the quality, why send her such wines?' Janie asked.

'Because I don't want her poisoned.'

This business over, he got a four-wheeler to convey Janie home, reserving the hansom to take him down to Victoria.

'Remember,' he said, 'that though she may not write to you, you may write as much as you like to her. And you may send her magazines, and illustrated things, and so forth, if you have them to spare; but I will take care that she has plenty of these.'

'If Sabie only knew,' said Janie, looking at him with kind eyes, 'she has one good friend.'

'Only one?' he said with a smile. 'I thought you had a little liking for her. Well, never mind. By the way, if you do go and tell this story about the wine to Master Phil, just ask him to mind his own business. I won't be interfered with. Good-bye!'

'Good-bye! Give my love to Sabie, and say I shall be down to see her in a day or two.'

So she drove away; and he made forthwith for Victoria Station, not ill-satisfied so far with his day's work.

CHAPTER XL

IN TIME OF NEED

ALL was going well; and it was with a cheerful equanimity he set about making matters as easy as might be for the anxious mother. From the very outset he had presumed to exercise a certain authority over her; he found he could get along better that way; he did as he chose, without waiting for her permission. One afternoon she said to him: 'Mr. Lindsay, do you think you could get a man from the village—I mean, do you think it would be fair to ask any one to come into the room——'

'To do what?' he said.

'I can't help thinking that one of the windows is not quite close up at the top; and I am afraid of the smallest draught. Both the nurse and I have tried to move the top sash, but we can't. Would it be fair to ask a man from the village to try?'

For answer he pushed aside the heavy and saturated curtains, and went by her into the sick-room.

'Which one is it?' he asked.

She protested; but he took no heed of her protest.

'I am not going anywhere where there are children,' he said briefly.

'But yourself?'

'I am not much afraid of that. Which sash is it?'

She showed him; and with little trouble the window was securely jammed up and fastened.

Then he had to dismiss the small servant-maid Elizabeth. Her mother came bothering about the place, with idiotic precautions and whining fears; at last he told her

to take her daughter away with her. Then he installed his own housekeeper, who forthwith got down from London a relative of hers to help her with the cooking. These dispositions being made, there remained for him only to cudgel his brains as to what he could send for to solace Sabina's imprisonment—books, magazines, reading-lamps, fruit, flowers, big flasks of Eau-de-Cologne—everything he could think of, and everything of the best. He had no need to fear the ingratitude shown by the Lady Greensleeves to her lover. He asked only for friendship; and he got it. When a summons brought Sabina to the door, and when she pulled aside the curtains a little way, her face would light up when she found that it was he who was on the landing. The embarrassed reticence that had puzzled him so much was almost entirely gone. She was glad to see him; she was very grateful for all he was doing for her; and she strove to show her sense of his kindness in her manner towards him. Nor was he ill to please—when it was Sabina who stood before him, talking to him, her eyes gentle and well-wishing as in the olden days.

The way of his life at this time was as follows: All the morning and mid-day he was at work at Burford Bridge. Then, as the dusk of the afternoon came on, he would take train to Witstead, and walk to Wayside Cottage, where he had to hear reports, open parcels, and the like. His recompense for that trouble was a protracted chat with Sabina, she standing half-hidden by the curtains, he leaning against the balustrade at the top of the stair. Thereafter he would set out for Burford Bridge by road. For about this time in the evenings there was now shining in the southern heavens a crescent moon, daily gaining in size and brilliancy, and over that there was a large silver-clear planet—a celestial cup and ball, as it were—and he was contemplating a series of drawings of moonlit skies. He had tried one before; his method being to have all his materials ready within doors; then to go out and get as accurate a mental record of appearances as he could obtain; and then to go quickly in and place these impressions, as nearly as he could, on paper. The critics were facetious, of course; some of them indignant. They declared that

he made the moon ridiculously small; that he must have been looking at it through the wrong end of a telescope. They asked him where he found the little touches of yellow round the edges of the silver-gray clouds. They disputed the rainbow-hues of his lunar halo. They suggested colour-blindness when he painted a highway, on a night of full moon, of a purple-gray with a faint russet hue interfused. But he did not pay much heed to these amateur observers or non-observers. He was too much concerned about getting his work done; and he chose to do that in his own way. They might call him perverse, pig-headed, obtuse; they might call his drawings capricious, whimsical, meretricious; somehow he did not mind. If they did not like his drawings, they could leave them; they were not bound to buy them unless they wished. And, as a matter of fact, they did not buy them; but the public did; and many of his fellow-artists did. Now when one painter goes the length of buying another painter's work—of actually buying it—that is the extremest form of praise.

The fever declaring itself to be of a mild form, and all things going on favourably, those little conversations between Sabina and Walter Lindsay were of a quite cheerful cast; and she had become very frank with him—except now and again, when she seemed to recollect herself, and to throw a reserve over her manner in a way that puzzled him. Ordinarily, however, she was most friendly; and showed no hesitation about asking him to do anything for her; once, indeed, she was nearly going beyond the bounds of discretion.

'Mr. Lindsay,' she said, recalling him as he was about to leave, 'I forgot something. I had a letter from my father this morning. Would you mind sending him a note saying why it is I cannot answer it?'

'Won't that look rather odd?' he said. 'I don't suppose Sir Anthony ever heard of me.'

'Never heard of you? Why, he has two of your landscapes in the drawing-room.'

'And who advised him to buy them?' he asked, with a sudden and vague hope.

'I wish I could say I did,' she answered honestly.

'But it was Lady Zembra did. And I am certain both of them know that you know me.'

'I am afraid Sir Anthony would be a little surprised to get such a note from me——'

'Oh, never mind, then,' she said promptly; 'Janie is coming down to-morrow—she will write for me.'

And yet he did not like to refuse to do Sabina a service.

'If you wish, I will send him word—as from an outsider—that the little boy is ill; and then he will come down and see you himself.'

'Papa come down here—to a house where there is fever?' she said, with a smile. 'It's little you know him. He would think you had gone mad if you suggested such a thing. He would tell you that there is nothing in the world more wicked and foolish than running unnecessary risks. Why, it was his fear of infection that made him turn me out of the house. And if he *were* to come down, I know how I should be lectured. Oh, shouldn't I catch it! "I told you so. I warned you what would happen if you wouldn't give up going to those slums. Here is your own child ill now!"'

'But there are no slums in Witstead?'

'Oh, that doesn't matter,' Sabina said cheerfully. 'It would be enough that I used to visit slums years ago. However, I think you are right; probably papa would be surprised. Janie will write when she comes to-morrow. And in the meantime I must consider how I am to thank her for sending me all that wine.'

'That is a simple matter, at all events.'

'How?'

'You have only to tell her that you have been using some of it. Do you know,' he continued—for it was most astonishing how, on one pretext or another, he would keep lingering on that dusky landing, while the beautiful silver crescent of the moon, far away in the southern skies, was shining for him in vain, and slowly sailing onwards to the west—'that I can never quite make out why it is that Janie is so impressive a person. When you come to think of it, there is nothing about her of the kind that ordinarily impresses people. She is not beautiful—the honest truth

is that she is rather plain; she hasn't a grand manner; she is neither brilliant, nor sarcastic, nor audacious in any way whatever; she has but little in the way of flocks and herds —and her jewels would be despised by a grocer's wife. She ought to be an insignificant kind of creature—one you would pass by without notice and forget. But she isn't anything of the kind to those who know her. She is a very decided personality. There is some curious distinction about her that I can't quite make out—you say to yourself, well, this plain little woman has something about her that one is forced to admire, and almost to reverence. She is not like every one else; there is a certain distinction and nobility about her somehow —— Spenser's "Regard of Honour and Mild Modesty" sometimes occurs to me— but, whatever it is, I know that in my little world Janie is a very distinct and important personality.'

'But isn't it simple enough?' Sabina said, in her bland way. 'Every one can see that Janie is a true, honest, unselfish, warm-hearted woman. What more?'

'Oh, but you can say that about lots of women,' he answered, in a dissatisfied kind of fashion, 'who have hardly any distinctive character at all—who don't interest you, in short. No; there is something about Janie that belongs definitely to herself.'

'At all events,' said Sabina, with a smile, 'it has not caused you to fall out. You are still friends, I hope?'

Shortly after that he was leisurely making his way south, under the clear dark skies, along a hard and ghostly gray highway, and through an almost silent land. He was absently thinking of many things; and not at all paying the attention that was due to the soft violet hues of the southern heavens, and to the crescent moon that seemed to have a touch of gold over its silver clearness. And if that riddle about Janie's distinctive character was still present to him, any third person could have answered it for him in a moment. Janie had many excellent qualities, no doubt; but that which obviously gave her value and importance and dignity in his eyes—that which made her lovable in a kind of way—was her devoted and loyal and unwavering affection for Sabina. He forgot that Janie was

rather plain-featured when he saw her eyes grow kind at the very mention of Sabina's name.

Janie came down the next day, and was mightily astonished to find Walter Lindsay's housekeeper in charge, for she had not heard of the most recent arrangements. Then she went upstairs—a little tremulous, perhaps—not knowing how Sabina was bearing her trouble. But the first glance she got of her friend reassured her.

'Sometimes,' Sabina said, when the first inquiries were over, 'sometimes I almost think it is like playing at having illness in the house—everything is made so easy and pleasant for us. It is not like a sick-room at all. If I could only show you——'

'Why not?' Janie said, and she made a step forward.

Sabina held up her hand.

'No, I will not allow it. It is not fair to other people. Mr. Lindsay did come in—to shut a window for us; but that was none of my doing; he did not wait for permission. But really if you saw how luxurious we are, Janie—the stoves we have, and screens, and reading-lamps, and toys lying about the bed, and little baskets of flowers above the mantelpiece—you would say that it was nursing made easy. Mr. Lindsay seems to think that I am greatly to be pitied because I shall be shut up in these two little rooms for some weeks to come. It's little he knows what some people have to suffer when sickness comes into their poor home. But you and I know, Janie.'

'Are you quarrelling with him because he is sorry for you?' Janie asked, reproachfully.

'Quarrelling? No. That is not likely. His kindness and thoughtfulness have just been beyond everything. Why, I cannot imagine how he came to think of so many things—what experience can he have had of what is serviceable in a sick-room? Well, no matter; all I know is that I shall never forget his goodness to me—never, never, never.'

'That is spoken more like yourself, Sabie,' her friend said; and then she added insidiously, 'I suppose he comes over from Burford Bridge now and again?'

'Every afternoon almost, when his work is finished.

He was here yesterday—and was speaking about you, by the way. He said some very pretty things about you.'

'Oh well, I don't care who knows what my opinion of him is,' Janie made answer boldly.

'Of course you don't. The two of you make a very excellent Society for Mutual Admiration.'

'Yes—of you.'

The remark was a quite innocent and unpremeditated one; but it seemed to startle Sabina somewhat. She instantly changed the subject.

'I want you to do something for me, Janie. There are one or two notes I must send; will you write them? Mrs. Reid will bring up a small table and a chair, if you ask her, and the writing materials. And the note that goes to papa must be sprinkled with carbolic acid, or he will be frightened out of his wits.'

So Janie set about her duties as amanuensis; and had no time to consider further why it was that Sabina had been so quickly startled by an innocent mention of Walter Lindsay's obvious admiration for her.

But if, during this first fortnight, all seemed going well—if it almost 'looked like playing at having illness'—a time came when that cheerful optimism was asked to pause and consider. Somehow the little boy did not recover his strength as he ought to have done. The fever had run its course, apparently in the most satisfactory way; and the doctor had not discovered symptoms of any of the *sequelæ* that frequently follow this dangerous disease; but all the same the child, instead of going forward to perfect health, seemed to linger. Sabina perceived this less than did the doctor and the nurse; or perhaps she shut her eyes to it; if any terrible doubts hammered for entrance into her mind, she held that closed against them, and barricaded herself along with her dearest hopes.

'You know,' she said one afternoon to Walter Lindsay, 'I am not in the least anxious to have the boy getting about soon. Oh no; not in the least. Of course, the risk of a chill must be so much greater in this cold weather. I have always thought that the hospitals shouldn't keep to their rule of sending scarlatina patients out at the end of

five or six weeks, when the weather is bitterly cold, or when the patient has a delicate constitution. Oh no, I should not be disappointed if Harry did not get out until—until the flowers came. Now is not that a poetical notion?' she continued, with real or affected cheerfulness. 'When the primroses and bluebells are thick in the woods, and the air quite soft, then Harry will make his first appearance out-of-doors. Poor little mite, he will have to be carried; you have no idea how his legs are wasted—of course, that is nothing unusual—oh dear no, I have often seen children unable to stand when getting up from a fever. Yes; I suppose he will have to be carried; and I am going to ask a favour from you when that great day comes—that splendid day—I am going to ask you to lend me that enormous coat of yours with the Canadian furs.'

'I will give it you, and gladly,' he said at once.

'Oh no, no, no; it is only for the first day; and we will wrap the dear in it; and the nurse will carry him out to look at the world again, and the primroses, and the woods. Why, wouldn't that make a subject for a picture—you might call it "The sick child's first day out-of-doors"—the nurse in her hospital dress, and the poor little white face peeping out from the furs.'

'The poor little white face,' she repeated absently—as if her eyes were turned backward, and regarding the sick-room behind her. 'And if you saw how thin and wasted his arms are—you remember the tramway-car you brought him—we used to tie a long string to it, and put it at the farthest end of the room, and let him pull it across to the bedside. But he has no strength for that now—or perhaps it is that he does not care for it any more——'

Tears trembled on her eyelashes; but the moment he tried to comfort her with a few reassuring words she altered her tone.

'Oh, that is nothing unusual,' she said quickly (as if she were eager to convince herself). 'I have often seen children like that. It isn't the plump children who are safest in a fever—quite the reverse. And Harry has always been a particularly healthy child. Of course, it will be a long time before he has quite recovered his strength, but I

shall be satisfied when I once see him out-of-doors, with some bluebells in his hand.'

'And if you don't object,' Lindsay said, 'I think I should like to come along and join that little excursion.'

But this same evening he waited for the doctor. The doctor was grave and reticent; he could not be got to say anything beyond the merest commonplaces about the little boy's condition. There was a singular lack of vitality, he said; there seemed to be no fight in the constitution; the recovery that was natural in the circumstances seemed to drag. Was there danger? No immediate danger, he thought; with sounder sleep, and some little increase in his food—if only he could be persuaded to take that—they would probably find him gradually emerging from this languor and extreme prostration. In the meantime everything that could be done was being done.

Lindsay walked somewhat slowly and thoughtfully home that evening—away through the wan, still, moonlit country. And his mind was busy not with the coming years, but with the coming weeks; and there were dark forebodings that, do what he could, would press in upon him. Once or twice he shivered slightly—as if some unknown terror had glided by, touching him as it went. Or perhaps it was only that the night was bitter cold.

CHAPTER XLI

A SEVERANCE

THE child still lingered on in that condition of impassive languor; but Sabina maintained her defiant attitude; she would talk of nothing but the young spring days, and the warm winds, and primroses in the woods, and the welcome big coat heavy with its Canadian furs. Only her lips grew thinner and paler; and her eyes were at times haggard, as if with much midnight thinking.

Once she broke down. Lindsay had been up to London, and had brought back with him a little toy, which he offered to her humbly. It was a light little thing that ran on wheels.

'It is not so heavy as the tram-car,' he said. 'Perhaps, now, if you would tie a bit of string to that, he could pull it across the floor.'

She looked at the toy in silence; there was a slight quivering of her lips.

'Yes, perhaps—perhaps,' she said in a low voice, 'but the thin wee arms are not very strong.'

She suddenly looked up, in a wild, frightened way.

'Mr. Lindsay, my boy is not going to die, is he? They are not going to take away my little boy from me?'

It was a cry of anguish rather than of appeal; her nerves were all unstrung; and the next moment she had burst into a frantic fit of weeping. The curtains fell from her hands; she was invisible to him; he could only hear her sobs. And then there was the sound of a door opening and shutting; she had gone away to her unceasing vigil, with its awful and growing fear.

He sent for Janie, who came down forthwith; and he went to meet her at the station. When she got out of the railway-carriage, she gave him her hand in silence; she was trembling like a leaf; she could not utter a word.

'I have got a room for you at the Checkers,' he said. 'It is the best they have. Of course you won't let her know you are here; it would only madden her with fright.'

'As you think best,' was all she said.

But as they were on their way to the village, she said to him: 'If anything happens to the boy, then it's all over with Sabie. He was just the world to her. If he is taken away, then she will give in—it will kill her.'

'Don't say that,' he answered gravely. 'Trouble comes to every one; it has to be borne.'

'But who has had such trouble as she has had—and who has so little deserved it?' she said, and she was very much excited in her distress. 'I say it is not—it is not justice! Yes, plenty of people have trouble—but they are not like Sabie. She has just lived for others. And now the little boy—her one consolation in the world—Mr. Lindsay, do you call that justice?'

'Things are not at their worst yet,' he said to her. 'I suppose you can stay here for a day or two?'

'Oh yes. How could I go away until—until I knew that the boy was out of danger?' said Janie bravely. 'Phil is going to run down to-morrow to see that I am comfortably settled; but I am sure there is no need.'

'As to that,' said he, 'if you would rather have the room that Mrs. Reid occupies now, I could send her to the Checkers to sleep. But I am afraid Sabina would get to know you were in the house—and it would alarm her.'

'No, no, the inn will do very well,' Janie said.

'I thought she ought to have a woman-friend near her, just in case anything should happen,' he continued. 'And I am sure I shall be glad to have you here, for a woman's judgment in lots of things is more delicate and discriminating than a man's. What do you think, now, of sending word to Sir Anthony that the little boy is seriously ill—I mean, without letting Sabina know; shouldn't that be done? Of course I would do nothing of the kind if I

thought he would come down and alarm her in some stupid way.'

Janie received the mention of Sir Anthony Zembra's name with marked coldness—nay, with open scorn.

'I wrote to him the last time I was down,' she said. 'Sabie asked me to write. The letter had to be soaked in carbolic acid, although it had never been in the sick-room at all. And do you think Sir Anthony would come near a house in which there was scarlet fever? Not likely. He has far too great a sense of his importance to the country. A man of such value to the nation couldn't afford to run any risk. And society—think of the possibility of society losing so handsome and distinguished-looking an ornament.'

'You are revengeful. But I really think we ought to send him word that the boy is seriously ill. And you must write the note.'

By this time they were arrived at the inn, where Janie found that they had prepared a very snug little room for her. There was a fire burning brightly; there were some books and flowers on the table; this would make quite an excellent little sitting-room in the daytime, if she chose. But besides that, they had placed at her disposal a small inner parlour downstairs, in which she could see any one: they seemed anxious to oblige this friend of the young mother whose trouble had awakened general sympathy.

Janie wrote the note to Sir Anthony that afternoon; and, contrary to all expectation, he came down to Witstead the very next day. But it was neither she nor Walter Lindsay—it was Lindsay's housekeeper, Mrs. Reid, who found at the door of the cottage this tall, handsome, fresh-complexioned, white-haired, bland-looking man. Standing a little bit back, he made the usual inquiries as to how the child was going on; and said he was sorry to have no better news. Then he said, 'You will tell Mrs. Foster that her father called——'

'I beg your pardon, sir,—her father, did you say?' Mrs. Reid said in some surprise.

'Yes.'

'But won't you come in, sir?'

'Oh dear, no—I suppose what you have told me is quite correct.'

'But wouldn't you like to see the poor lady, sir?'

'No, no; no, no. I suppose you are not aware that she has brothers and sisters. She herself would be the last to expect that I should run the risk of carrying infection to members of her own family.'

He delivered these sentences with that calm and impressive manner well known to the House of Commons, when, having caught Mr. Speaker's eye, he rose to his feet, placed his right hand within the breast of his frock-coat, and, with another glance round the House, said, 'Sir!' Naturally, this poor housekeeper was overawed; but she was an elderly woman, with some experience of human life; and she had a bewildered, instinctive notion that a father would like to see his daughter—if only but to say a kindly word to her—in the time of her great trouble.

'Perhaps you don't understand, sir—the two rooms are quite isolated,' she said. 'There are carbolic curtains separating them from the rest of the house. There would be no risk of carrying infection.'

'Permit me to be the best judge of that,' he observed.

'Oh, certainly, sir,' she said, with apparent humility; but she was beginning to rebel a little; she was a vertebrate animal.

'And I will thank you to take my instructions. I wish my daughter to be informed that I called; and that I was sorry not to hear better news. If she wants for anything, I hope she will write—by a third person, mind—be particular about that, if you please—she must write by a third person, as she did on the last occasion—and I will see that her wishes are attended to. Good-morning!'

'Good-morning, sir,' said Mrs. Reid; and for a minute or two she stood on the doorstep, looking after the stately and handsome gentleman, who passed down through the little garden and finally disappeared away along the road. But she did not at once go upstairs. She had been interrupted in some domestic duties; and she went back to the kitchen to resume these; and for a while she was chiefly engaged in considering what kindly little messages

she could safely add to that which had been left with her to deliver. And she thought that when Mr. Lindsay came along in the afternoon, and when she confessed what she had done, he would say that these lies were very white indeed.

So the anxious days passed. Lindsay saw little of Sabina now. When he rapped at the door she sent the nurse. She would not leave the bedside where that small life seemed to be flickering so feebly. The nurse said to him once: 'I wish you would speak to her, sir. She won't take any rest. Sometimes she falls into a dose in her chair—for a few minutes, that is all. No human being can bear up against that long.'

'Tell her I want to see her,' he said.

In a second or two Sabina was there; he was shocked at the change he saw.

'You are acting very wrongly,' he said. 'This weakness may last for a long time—what is to become of your care, of your nursing, if you will take no rest?'

'I have tried—I cannot sleep,' she said, simply.

'No, you cannot sleep so long as you remain in that room. Why not lie down in the nurse's room, when it is her turn to sit by him?'

'I cannot be away from my boy,' she said.

Then she suddenly raised her head, and fixed a strangely scrutinising glance upon him, as if she would read him through and through.

'Mr. Lindsay, is the doctor telling me the whole truth? He is not concealing anything? What does he say to you?'

Piteous and haggard as were her eyes, he felt that they had a certain command in them.

'You are my friend—I trust you to tell me the whole truth,' she said. 'You cannot refuse.'

Well, he did not try to shirk the responsibility. As nearly as he could he repeated the very phrases—inconclusive as these were—which the doctor had used to himself. She listened in silence, and she seemed to be weighing every word. The pale, sad face betrayed no emotion; but her eyes were distant and thoughtful as she retired, without further questioning, into the room.

He went over the way to the Checkers and sent for Janie to come downstairs.

'I suppose you have all your things ready?' he said—referring to a complete change of costume she had got down from London, lest at any moment she might be asked to take her place in the sick chamber.

'Yes, everything,' was the instant answer.

'Well, there is only one thing to be done, as far as I can see,' he continued. 'Sabina is killing herself. The watching and the anxiety combined are too much for her—you can see it in her face, in her eyes. Poor creature, it is no longer "like playing at having illness in the house." That was making sure too soon.'

'What do you want me to do?' Janie said.

'I want you to go right into the room and insist on remaining there; and then you must force Sabina to lie down from time to time and get some rest. The nurse has no authority over her; you must have.'

'I may frighten her if I go in suddenly,' Janie said in doubt.

'She is frightened of only one thing—she thinks of nothing else—she will hardly heed you,' he said.

So Janie went over to the cottage and installed herself in the sick-room without protest. There was little nursing to be done; only waiting, and waiting for what nearly every one in secret feared.

One evening the doctor came downstairs and found Walter Lindsay reading a book in the little parlour. He was really waiting for news.

'Don't you think you should send for her father?' the doctor said.

Lindsay looked up quickly. 'Then the end is near?'

'I am afraid so,' the doctor said, speaking low so that no one should overhear. 'Never since this lingering began has there been any sign of a fight against it—nothing but a gradual losing of vitality; and now the child is alive, but that is all you can say.'

'But surely patients sometimes recover after they have got down to the lowest phase of exhaustion?—isn't there a chance?—if it is only weakness, there might come a turn?'

He put these questions without much hope of an answer. What he was really thinking of was Sabina in her lonely condition—bereft of all she cared for on earth. Nor was this the first time that picture had come before his mind. For days back dread possibilities had been ever present; and in his solitary evenings, sitting before the fire and absently looking to the future, he sometimes saw a young widow, in deepest mourning, enter a little churchyard. There was a small white gravestone there with flowers around it, and perhaps, after the simple record of name and date, this inscription—'*Du Heilige, rufe dein Kind zurück.*' The young mother kneeling—that was a pitiful sight—and putting further little flowers on the little grave.

He had almost forgotten the presence of the doctor in the room.

'There is no hope, then?' he said, looking up from his reverie.

'One must never say that,' was the answer. 'But for myself, I think the end is near.'

'Does she know?'

'I imagine so, though nothing definite has been said. I hear she has had some violent fits of crying, when she was by herself in the smaller room. I think she is prepared for the worst. Indeed, she is almost in a dazed condition, what with want of sleep and fatigue and dread of what may happen. I am glad of it. She is so worn out that when the end does come, it will be less of a shock; her nerves seem to be numbed; she goes about in a kind of hopeless and mechanical way—yes, I think she must know.'

'As for sending for her father, that would be no use, as he would not come near a house where there had been scarlet fever. And as for her late husband's father, he can't stir out-of-doors on account of rheumatism, or he would have been here ere now, he writes. But when you think the crisis is at hand, I will go along to the Vicarage and ask Mr. Lulworth to come and be with her. The family have been very kind to her, and she has a great respect for the old man: don't you think I should do that?'

'Certainly.'

'When?'

'As far as appearances go, I think the boy may last through the night.'

'But not much longer?' said Lindsay, considerably startled.

The doctor shook his head. 'I am afraid not,' he said.

However, it was not until late the following night that the end came. Janie was in the room and the clergyman; the nurse had retired—her services were unavailing now; Walter Lindsay was below, waiting anxiously enough for news. Sabina would not leave the bedside; she knelt there motionless, voiceless, tearless, holding the small, thin hand in hers; her very soul hanging on that faint breathing that was gradually growing more and more feeble. And then the little life, happily without any struggle, passed quite quietly away; and the mother's head fell forward on the bed with a dumb moan of agony. No tears came to her aid; she was too worn out and bewildered and stricken down. Consciousness seemed to have gone from her with that low wail of pain. Janie was at her side, and would have taken her away; but the next moment Sabina was erect, in the middle of the floor, and her eyes were as of one bereft of reason, taking no heed of those around her, and for a second she looked as if she were listening. Then she went quickly to the window and tore aside the blind. Far overhead the midnight skies were shining; the myriad stars were cold and clear. A little way she raised her trembling fingers as if she would fain reach to those distant plains; and then they heard the stifled and piteous cry—

'And there is no one—no one there—to take care of my little boy!'

'No one,' said the clergyman, 'no one—except Christ the Lord.'

And then he put his hand on her arm, and led her from the room.

CHAPTER XLII

DARKENED DAYS

THIS should have been a wedding morning. The earth had donned her fairest bridal robes—the soft snow mantle gaining a touch of gold from the wintry sunlight; clear and cloudless shone the pale blue skies; there were diamonds sparkling in the hedgerows; the vane of the church-spire flashed a distant ray. But it was a black-hued little procession that moved slowly through the white, hushed world—out from the straggling village, along the rutted lane, and up to the gate of the churchyard. The neighbours were lingering about the porch; when the tiny coffin had been carried in they followed and entered the pews; no one seemed to notice that, just before the door was shut, two women, both dressed in deep mourning and closely veiled, came in last of all, and took their places rather apart from the rest. They were in the dusk; their heads were bent down; not even Walter Lindsay guessed that the stricken mother was there, come to hear those dreadful words of a last farewell.

When the service was over, and the little crowd passed out again into the sunlight and the snow, these two remained behind for a second.

'Sabie—dear Sabie—come home now! You can't hear it; it will kill you!'

She did not answer; she only shook her head. But as they went out into the white churchyard she held Janie's arm tight, for she was trembling a little. They took up their station a short distance from the others; the bystanders paid no heed to them; all eyes were turned towards the

clergyman and the open grave and the small, small coffin covered with white flowers. It was when they proceeded to lower that tiny coffin into the grave that Janie found her companion was shaking like a leaf, so that she was afraid she would totter and fall; and when the first sprinkling of earth struck with its hollow and ominous sound, the young mother uttered a short and stifled cry, as if a dagger had gone through her heart. Janie had almost to drag her away. 'My little boy!'—that was all she said; and she spoke no more as they made their way back to the village, far in advance of the others, the two black figures in that world of white. Arrived there, Janie took her to her own room in the inn. Sabina was purposeless in a strange kind of way; she sat down at the window, where she could see—across the dreamlike waste of snow—the little church, and its windows, and the spire, and the vane sending forth its steady golden ray. Then her head fell forward on her hands.

A message came for Janie that Sir Anthony Zembra was below, and wanted to see her. She went down to the small parlour. Never in all this world was there a more suave and distinguished-looking and perfectly-appointed mourner; as he took off his black kid gloves and put them on the table, so that he might rub his hands because of the cold, and as he took up his position on the hearth-rug in front of the fire, he seemed to say that not any one of the trials or duties of life could find him wanting; put the occasion before him—he was there, and equal to it.

'I heard that she was with you,' he remarked. He had not seen his daughter that morning—not having cared to go within doors.

'Yes,' Janie answered. 'She will stay here until the house is disinfected. My husband and Mr. Lindsay were going up to London immediately the funeral was over to see about having it done at once.'

'A most necessary measure,' Sir Anthony observed, with approval. 'It is an imperative duty that one owes to the rest of the community. And I hope it will be done thoroughly, whether Sabina goes back to the cottage or not. She herself has always been too reckless in such matters——'

'I don't think so at all!' Janie said rather hotly; who was he that he should criticise Sabina's conduct?

'Ah, you joined with her in those foolish enterprises,' he said, with a superior air.

'My share in them may have been foolish enough—Sabie's never was,' said Janie, whose meek eyes were growing indignant. 'It's all very well for people who sit in their own homes, surrounded by every selfish luxury—it's all very well for them to talk of foolishness when any one tries to do a little good in the world. Perhaps you never even took the trouble to go and see what it was that Sabie was doing?'

'We will not discuss the question,' he said, in his grand manner. 'If I have offended you, I beg your pardon. I merely wished to express the hope that before my daughter goes back to the cottage the most rigid precautions may be taken to guard against the spread of infection. Temerity in such matters is the worst of folly. It is not bravery; it is criminal heedlessness. And I think that even you cannot deny that Sabina has always shown herself far too careless—only now she may be warned by the terrible consequences.'

'But what do you mean?' Janie said, with her face grown a trifle pale. 'That Sabie was careless about her boy?—that she was responsible——' Janie's words failed her; her indignation was too great. But she pulled herself together. 'Have you anything further to say to me, Sir Anthony?' she demanded coldly. 'I am going back to Sabie.'

'I wish to hear what she proposes doing,' Sir Anthony said, 'that is all.'

'I don't know,' was Janie's answer.

'For it is quite absurd her going back to live by herself in that cottage,' he continued. 'I suppose that at present it would be useless for me to see her, to discuss the matter with her.'

'She won't see anybody—she can't,' Janie answered.

'At all events I should like her to know this,' Sir Anthony said, 'that Lady Zembra is perfectly willing that she should return to her own home—always, of course, on condition that she should abandon those pursuits which

made that impossible when she used to be in London. Probably she has had enough of that. In the circumstances, then, and with the condition I name, we are quite willing she should return to her own home.'

'As for that,' said Janie (and there was a touch of scorn in her voice that might have pierced Sir Anthony's complacency, had that not been so entirely gigantic), 'as for that, Sabie will never have to go begging for a home. There are plenty who would be proud to have her—proud and pleased. And I know that if she will come and live with us, neither my husband nor myself will stay to impose any condition—no—she shall live in any way she chooses—and I can answer for it that her welcome will be none the less.'

'Ah,' said Sir Anthony, looking at her as if she were some kind of sentimental maniac. 'Well, it is a good thing to have friends. But friendship is apt to get strained if one lives continually in the same house.'

'Was it ever so in Kensington Square?' said Janie boldly.

He did not answer that question.

'Common sense,' he went on to observe, 'would suggest that a single woman in her circumstances should come and live in her own home. At the same time, if she prefers her freedom—I mean, if she wishes to return to the occupations of those former days—well and good; she will have her allowance as before.'

Janie interposed quickly, and with a flushed forehead.

'Of course, if she comes to live with us, it will be as our guest. That is clearly understood by all of us.'

'Oh, then you have put that proposal before her?'

'Yes.'

'And her answer?'

'It was only a suggestion—we wanted her to know that there was a home awaiting her—and she said nothing definite in reply. And at present it is useless to say anything.'

'At all events,' Sir Anthony said, 'you are of opinion that she should not continue to live by herself in that cottage? Why, good gracious, she might be murdered in bed; that would be a nice story to get into the papers!'

This indeed was an appalling thought—that the name of Sir Anthony Zembra might be dragged into the public prints in connection with an obscure and revolting village tragedy!

'Yes, I want to get her away from here,' said Janie, sadly, 'but it is no use talking to her at present. I wish she was not going back into the cottage at all. I wish she would come away with us this very afternoon, as soon as Phil—my husband, I mean—as soon as he comes down from town. That would be the best thing.'

'Then do you return home this afternoon?'

She glanced at him in surprise; she could hardly understand any human being putting such a question.

'Oh no! How could I do that? How could I leave Sabie at such a time—alone? If she would go with us, that would be well; but as it is I must remain with her to see what she is going to do.'

'And when she has decided that, I hope you will let me know,' Sir Anthony said, and he took up his gloves. 'I presume, when these sanitary measures have been carried out, there will be no possibility of a letter conveying infection. You might tell my daughter that Lady Zembra would have written to her to express her sympathy but that she thought it more prudent not to open communication with a house in which there was fever. We have got to consult the safety of others, not our own feelings.'

When he had delivered himself of this wise saying, Sir Anthony took up his hat and umbrella; again asked Janie to communicate with him when Sabina had come to a decision; bade her good-bye graciously; and set out for the station. He walked with an air of lofty satisfaction; he seemed to think that it was he who was diffusing that cheerful sunlight over the wide landscape.

Those next few days at Witstead were terrible. Sabina had wholly given way to a dumb stupor of misery and hopelessness; she was as one walking in the dark, seeing nothing of what was around her, heeding no one. She hardly ever spoke; she had no wild fits of crying; there was nothing but this dreadful monotony of unuttered and unutterable grief. Mechanically she went up every morning

to the little grave, with a poor handful of flowers; sometimes she would go in the afternoon too; and always her dull despairing thoughts were there.

Janie sought in vain to distract her and arouse her. Sometimes she wilfully inflicted pain if but to break in upon this dangerous listlessness. Once she went the length of asking what should be done, when they could go into the house again, with the little boy's toys and playthings. Sabina shivered, but did not answer.

Janie went to Walter Lindsay, who was pretty frequently over at Witstead, hurrying on the workmen.

'I do everything I can to get her to talk,' said Janie, 'and of course she has to settle what she is going to do. But it is very strange. She is keeping something back from me. It is always, "Wait a little while and I will tell you." I don't understand it at all. Even about the house: it appears it belongs to a Mr. Deane; but she does not know where he is; and when I asked her how she paid the rent, it was the same thing—"Wait a little while, Janie, and I will tell you everything. I cannot talk to you now, or to any one." But she thinks it is you who put the fresh flowers on the little grave every morning. Is it?'

'No.'

'Do you know who it is, then?'

He hesitated.

'Oh well, if you must know, it is one of the Lulworth girls. I asked her to do it for me. I have them sent down from London, and she takes them up. You need not say anything about it.'

Janie thought she would follow her own counsel about that.

'Then, what do you think she is going to do?' he asked.

'As likely as not she will go back to the hospital and become permanent nurse,' Janie answered—but this was merely a guess of her own. 'It is dreadful to think of the poor, broken, wasted life. You remember what Sabie used to be in the old days? Well, last night I was lying awake, and I was wondering whether it would not be possible for some one to take Sabie entirely away from what has happened during these last years—to take her away altogether, to

some other country, and teach her to forget. And I thought that you were the only one who cared for her enough, and had money to do it as well; and I saw all sorts of pictures of you two—walking along the Promenade Anglais at Nice—and Sabie laughing and happy again——'

He turned very pale, but she did not notice; she was intent upon her waking dreams of the previous night.

'Yes, and I followed you to Venice—I was an invisible ghost attending you—and I saw Sabie feeding the pigeons in the Square—and I saw you and her in one of the glass factories over at Murano, and you were drawing her initials on a bit of paper so that the man could copy them and put them on the jug he was moulding for her. I wonder if such a thing ever happens in the world—for people to forget the years of misery they have gone through, and become happy again as they used to be? It seems hard if it is impossible.'

However, these were but forecasts of a vague and shadowy future; and in the meantime Janie was soon to be startled by a definite announcement of Sabina's plans. On the second evening after they had returned to Wayside Cottage—the fumigation and so forth all being over—these two were seated in the little parlour together, Janie sewing, Sabina pretending to read, but more often with her calm, sad eyes fixed wistfully on the fire before them. At length she took a letter from her pocket.

'Janie,' she said, 'a few days ago I wrote to old Mr. Foster, down in Buckinghamshire, and this morning I received his answer.'

Janie was a little surprised to have heard nothing of this before; and quite simply and naturally she put out her hand to take the letter—for there never had been secrets between these two. It was hastily withdrawn, however.

'He writes very kindly,' Sabina said, slowly; 'and he asks me to go and live with him, though he says it's a dull house—I wonder if he thinks it is gaiety that I should prefer.'

'And are you going?' said Janie, rather breathlessly.

'When I have everything settled up here—yes. I think it is the best thing I can do.'

'Oh Sabie, we shall never see you at all!' Janie cried.

'And don't you think that would be best?' was the calm answer: she was staring absently into the flames.

Janie's eyes grew moist quickly enough.

'After the friends that you and I have been, Sabie, it does seem—a little hard—that you should talk in that quiet way about going away from us for ever.'

'But I shall not forget,' the other said. 'And soon after I am there I will write you a long, long letter, to explain a number of things. I ought to tell you the whole story now, but I have not the courage. And I am so tired,' she added wearily.

Janie did not understand what this promise meant; and perhaps paid little attention to it, for she was bent on opposing this decision—it seemed so dreadful that Sabina should withdraw herself into a seclusion so remote from all those who had known her.

'You have so many friends in London, Sabie! It was bad enough your coming down here; but now, when there is no reason in the world why you shouldn't come and live with us—I wish Phil were here, and he would speak for himself—to think of your going away down to that place, to bury yourself alone, and brood over all that has happened? Is it wise? Is it reasonable? Surely you should come amongst your friends—I don't mean at this precise moment, but by and by, when time has begun to tell a little. We don't ask you to come to any gaiety. It is a quiet house. You would have your own rooms; no one should disturb you when you wished to be alone.'

For answer Sabina took Janie's hand and patted it a little.

'You have always been so kind to me—I never could understand why. But I am going down to Buckinghamshire, Janie,' she said.

It was later on that same evening—in the dead silence that was broken only by the click of Janie's needle—that Sabina looked up from her reveries and said, 'Janie, there is one thing I must do before I leave this place. I must say something to Mr. Lindsay of what I feel towards him for all his goodness to me—his generous goodness and thoughtfulness and kindness. I am sure I don't know how

I shall say it—but I must try. I cannot go away and leave him to think me ungrateful.'

'That he never would think, nor any other ill of you, Sabie!' Janie said eagerly. 'But surely you are right—surely you can do no less,—and a word from you would be a great deal to him,' she made bold to add.

'I suppose you don't know when he will be here again?' was the next question.

'No, but I could send him a note,' said Janie promptly.

'You might tell him that I was going away, and that I wished to say good-bye—if it would be not too much trouble for him to call when he was in the neighbourhood.'

Janie's nimble brain soon fashioned forth a better scheme than that—though she kept it to herself. Could she not, on the next morning, find some pretence for slipping out, and make her way south to Burford Bridge by one of the early trains? A few words with himself would be of greater service than any note; and was not the occasion urgent? Sabina was going away. She would be beyond the influences she had known; she would forget; she would sink into apathy; she was closing the book of her life. But what if, at such a juncture—and she was helpless and distraught and uncertain—some sudden appeal were made to her? It seemed dreadful to think of weddings and wedding-bells, when one had to think, too, of the little grave lying far away there amid the as yet unmelted snow; but short of that, might not some vague hint be given her that wherever her footsteps might lead her, there would always remain open for her the refuge of a strong man's love, when time and distance had dulled the edge of her cruel sorrows?

CHAPTER XLIII

FAREWELL WORDS

YET this was a delicate and difficult task that Janie had undertaken. She could not forget that on Walter Lindsay's return from America he had told her plainly enough that any relationship between Sabina and himself should be just as Sabina wished it to be, and that he would be content with that, nor seek for anything more. Also, in this latter time of trouble, his kindness towards Sabina, though it had been great and obvious and assiduous, had been rather the kindness of an affectionate brother or intimate friend, assuming the right to do things for her as a matter of course. There had been none of the sensitiveness of a lover about him. Almost there had been a trifle too much authority. But perhaps the occasion did not permit of any studious refinements of manner; and Sabina, at least, as Janie knew, had taken no offence.

However, during the brief journey to Burford Bridge, the more Janie looked at the main object of her self-imposed mission, the less she liked it. She began to grow very uncomfortable. It was too great a responsibility. At last—and with a considerable sense of relief—she resolved to throw it over altogether; she would surely deliver Sabina's message; and that, she knew, would be welcome. Accordingly, when she reached the hotel, and found that Lindsay had already gone off to his work, she made no scruple about sending for him; she guessed that he would not resent the interruption.

In the meantime she began to look round these bachelor quarters with not a little curiosity. She half expected to find some portrait or photograph of Sabina—even some

slight pencil drawing—but there was nothing of the kind. Apparently he had brought down with him few things beyond what he needed for his daily toil. A volume of *Volkslieder* stood at the open piano; and there were some loose sheets of music on the top. Hardly any books were about; and there were no newspapers. Two large portfolios in a corner, no doubt, contained the bulk of his drawings; and she did not presume to open these; but on the mantelpiece—above the pipes and match-boxes and cards of invitation—and also at the back of the piano, were a number of more or less rough sketches, which she proceeded to examine with considerable interest, for she wondered what he could find in such a place at such a time of the year. And it may be said that Janie had had long enough training in the art-world to appreciate certain qualities as distinct from the mere choice of a subject. Incomplete as most of these drawings were, she could see how everywhere the painter of them showed himself easy master of his own method; she understood their reticence, their simplicity, their refinement scornful of perversity or whim or trick. For the true artist does not seek to astonish; his work has reserve and repose; it demands study, patience, companionship; it is not for those who choose to run as they read. The Cook's tourist who darts through Venice has no time for Titian's 'Assumption'; but probably, as he jumps into the railway-carriage, he has in his pocket a number of the *Petit Journal pour Rire;* and every one knows what a gay and smart piece of colour is ordinarily to be found on the outer page of that interesting print.

Janie was standing there in the room, and wishing that Phil would for a little while forsake his mysterious and allegorical virgins to paint for her a series of transcripts of the outer world that she could hang up in her own room (that he could do so, at least in a measure, she never doubted; for what figure-painter's wife ever believed her husband incapable of painting landscape?) when Walter Lindsay made his appearance.

'Pray forgive me for disturbing you,' she said. 'But I have a message from Sabie.' She thought that would make all things smooth.

'Oh, but I am delighted to welcome a visitor—my first since I came here. Won't you sit down? I hope the message is nothing serious.'

'Oh no, not at all. She wanted me to send you a note; but I thought I might come along and tell you—the distance is so short. Sabie's message was this—she would like to see you for a few minutes any time you could make it convenient. The fact is she knows how kind you have been to her all through this terrible trouble; and she wants to thank you—she wants to assure you she is not ungrateful—and so will you come and see her?'

'It is quite unnecessary,' he said. 'If I can be of any service to her, I will go at once, and at a moment's notice; but not for a trifle of this kind. She has other things to think of. Tell her the message she has sent through you is enough—and more than enough.'

'But, Mr. Lindsay, you don't understand!' Janie cried. 'Sabie is going away!'

There was a sudden lump in Janie's throat. Almost she was on the point of blurting out some incoherent appeal—'Mr. Lindsay, are you in love with her still?—will you keep Sabie from going away from all of us?' But she collected herself. She had resolved to abstain from any such dangerous interference. She had merely to give him Sabina's message.

'Going away?' he repeated vaguely. 'Yes, I supposed that would come; and it will be better for her. Where is she going?'

'Away down to Buckinghamshire—to live with old Mr. Foster—and we shall never see her again!' Janie said. 'Fancy her alone there, with that old man for her only company. Now, if she would only come to Kensington Square, where her friends could see her, and take her about a little, and keep her from thinking. Or if she would come to live with us, that would be best of all; for I could look after her from morning till night; and Phil would be delighted—I shouldn't wonder if she sat to him, for she is so awfully good-natured, and that would be better for his work than having those scraggy creatures about. You might come to see us then, Mr. Lindsay,' Janie added,

looking up rather wistfully; for she had been thinking of what evenings they might have together, she and Phil, and Sabina and Lindsay, when all this time of sorrow had gone by.

'Oh, she is going down into Buckinghamshire?' he said thoughtfully. 'Well, I think that is very wise. She will be better alone for a while. It is too soon to think of her going amongst friends. When does she go?'

'Almost immediately,' said Janie, who was disappointed that he took Sabina's departure in this matter-of-fact way. 'As soon as she can leave the house in proper charge—I think she is waiting to hear from some one. But she is very reserved about all her arrangements; and of course one does not wish to worry her with questions at such a time. She says she is tired. Indeed, she is quite worn out, mentally and physically; and so listless; she does not seem to care what happens to her.'

'That will all come right,' he said. 'She has a strong physique. Nature will work its own cure.'

'This is the first time she has shown any interest in anything outside that churchyard,' Janie said; 'I mean in her anxiety that you should know she was grateful to you for all you had done for her.'

Janie looked at him with almost appealing eyes. But he merely said,

'Please tell her not to bother about that. I understand perfectly. Her message through you is enough—more than enough.'

'Mr. Lindsay, when Sabina asks you to come and see her, you are not going to refuse?'

'Oh, if you put it that way, certainly not. I will come and see her, if she wishes. I only meant that it was not worth while bothering about such a trifle.'

'She does not consider it a trifle. Of course,' added Janie, with a little hesitation, 'I had hoped if you came along, that you would help me to persuade Sabie not to go away into Buckinghamshire. It seems a pity she should separate herself from her friends, just when she stands in most need of them. And she has suffered a great deal during these past years—I think they would be willing to

try to make it up to her a little. It seemed to me that we might try to get her to look more like the Sabie we used to know.'

'Time may do that—but not any of us,' he said.

'Couldn't one help?' said the faithful Janie. 'But, of course, if it is your opinion that she should go away, there is no more to be said. I thought you would have been the first to ask her to stay.'

'I think her own instinct is right,' he said. 'And it isn't as if she were going away to some distant country, never to return. Some day you will find Sabina in London again, when she will be better able to face the sympathy of friends.'

'And will you be there, then?'

'Oh, most likely. Why not?'

With a little sigh Janie rose to go.

'When shall I come along to see her?' he asked.

'Whatever time is most convenient. This evening?'

'Yes.'

'Very well. Until then, good-bye.'

'Oh, but you must not go like that,' said he. 'If this isn't a Scotch house, this is a Scotchman's lodging. Let me see—I can't offer you tea or wine at this hour of the day—and I haven't any confections——'

He was looking round the room.

'Oh yes, this will do,' he said, and he fetched one of the big portfolios and threw it open on the table. 'Take a sketch with you. Choose one for yourself.'

'Mr. Lindsay, I cannot, really!' Janie protested. 'They are too valuable.'

'You must not leave the place empty-handed.'

Janie hesitated. She could see that these drawings were much more important and finished studies than those lying about the room.

'Well, to tell you the truth,' said she, 'I was wishing before you came in that Phil could make me some landscape sketches for my own little room at home—that would meet one's eyes every morning—and always with a fresh delight—and if I were to tell you which of all those beautiful things it was that chiefly provoked my envy——'

She went to the piano, and selected one of the drawings there. It was a simple little study of evening light; a wan glare in the western heavens; that repeated in a wet road; between, a strip of dusky hill, with a black wood at its base.

'That one!' he said. 'There is not much in that. But it will do to begin the little collection for your boudoir. Tell Master Phil to levy contributions all round; and then we will have a consultation some day about having them framed in a series.'

He got a couple of pieces of board and made up a small parcel for her; and then he accompanied her to the door, where, with renewed thanks to him, she left. But Janie would have been pleased if, instead of this beautiful little gem of a water-colour, she had taken with her some assurance or hope that that evening he was coming along to ask Sabina to let him provide for her, at least, a safe and happy home.

It was later than he had intended when he reached Witstead; for he had walked, and there were some twilight effects that had caused him to linger by the way. He had convinced himself that it was without perturbation that he was about to bid farewell to Sabina. As she would probably be in a nervous and depressed and emotional state, it was necessary for him to have plenty of firmness on his side. He should make the parting easy for her; and would take care to cut short this formal business of thanksgiving.

When he entered the room Sabina rose to receive him, and came forward a step or two. There were sudden tears in her eyes; she gave him a trembling hand; she could not speak. But happily Janie was there; and presently, when he had taken a seat, he and Janie found themselves talking about all kinds of indifferent things, and amongst others of the little picture, for carrying off which Janie was now making abundant apologies.

'But that is one of the privileges of a painter,' he said. 'If only his friends think the thing worth hanging up, it serves to recall him to their memory now and again when he may be half a world away. It is purchasing remembrance at a cheap rate.'

'I don't know about the cheapness of the rate,' said

Janie. 'I know Phil will be horribly angry with me for having robbed you of such a beautiful sketch.'

'But sometimes one doesn't need any such help to the memory,' Sabina said, in rather a low voice.

Janie now said she would go and ask Mrs. Reid to let them have some tea. She did so; but she did not come back. She went into the dining-room, and lit a candle and sat down there—with her heart beating a little.

Just as she left a look of fright passed into Sabina's eyes, but that was for the briefest second; she seemed to nerve herself for this interview. Why? he asked himself. He had no wish for any formal expression of thanks.

'Mr. Lindsay,' she said, with her eyes cast down, 'Janie says she told you why I wanted you to come here this evening——'

'And I told her how unnecessary it was,' he said, interrupting her. 'I see you are embarrassed at this moment. Why should that be so? These things are better understood than expressed. What mortal creature could be so inhuman as not to do what little he could at such a time? It is not worth speaking about.'

'Ah, do not say so!' she exclaimed, and for a moment she looked up and regarded him with her soft and gentle and grief-worn eyes. 'I will never forget it—never—never—through all the years I may live—and my gratitude to you will be always the same, and will remain ever with me, even if I am not allowed to call you friend.'

He was amazed and bewildered.

'Why, what do you mean?' he cried.

'There was something else I meant to have told you,' she said, with a tired look on her face. 'I have been trying all the afternoon to bring myself to it before going away. But I cannot do it. I am not very strong just now—and—and——'

Her hands fell listlessly in her lap.

'I am sure I would not ask you to tell me anything that would cause you pain,' he said. 'If I had known there was any possibility of such a thing, I would not have come here this evening.'

'But you will have to be told,' she said, with a further

effort. 'I will write. I will write to Janie. She will explain to you. And I think Janie will forgive me. But you won't. You are a man; you will take a man's view. And this is all I ask of you—when you find how weak, and foolish, and wicked I have been—when you say that I am no longer fit to be called your friend——'

'I never will, so help me God!' he said; but she went on unheeding,

'—All I ask is this, that though we should never meet again in this world, or, if we should meet—well, perhaps you would pass me by as a stranger—but what I ask is, that if ever you should think of me you will believe that I have not ceased, that I never will cease, to remember your goodness to me at the darkest time of my life.'

Her lips quivered for a moment. As for him, he was stricken dumb. Some wild fancy flashed through his brain that he would ask her if she did not know that his very existence was hers, to be done with as she chose; that faith in the beauty and nobility of her womanhood was as necessary to him as sunlight and the skies of heaven; that, no matter what sorrows or secret troubles might be surrounding her, he was ready to take her by the hand, and lead her home as sister, or friend, or wife. But how was he to speak words of love, with the fresh-made little grave still present to his mind? Was that the comfort he could offer to the bereft mother? She was safe in the sanctity of her grief—though his heart bled for her.

'Yes,' she said, with an absent air, 'I have been looking at it every way; and I am prepared for that; and deserve it. You will say that I deceived you, and that I accepted all your kindness under false pretences. Janie will understand a little—the terror I was in when my darling was taken ill—how thankful I was to any one who would help me—I had no time to think—I cared only for the saving of my little boy's life——'

Here she broke down altogether; and quickly rose and went sobbing from the room. When she returned, a little time thereafter, he said,—

'Of course, I cannot imagine what you mean; and I don't press for any explanation. I am content to wait. I am content

to wait because I know that nothing you can say will alter the relations between you and me. Of that I am as certain as that I am here at this moment. How can I have anything to forgive—or to overlook either? It is impossible. And supposing there was such a thing—which, I say again, is impossible—do you think that the judgment of a woman by a man is harsher than the judgment of another woman? I don't think so. I think you would find a man quite as forgiving as a woman. Of course that is all in the air. You have no forgiveness to seek from me—it is out of the question. But when you speak of friendship, that is different. I hope, as long as you and I are alive, that at least will exist between us. Nothing may arise to show the measure of it—'

'As if you had not proved that already!' she said.

'But there it is, and always will be. I pledge you my word—and my hand.'

He stretched out his hand to her; she took it, and, stooping her head, touched it with her lips.

'God bless you for what you have done for me in my time of agony,' she managed to say.

'And do not forget what I have pledged you—no matter what you may write to Janie,' was his answer.

Mrs. Reid came in with the tea-things, and Janie followed. Their talk was chiefly about Sabina's going away, the journey down to Missenden, and so forth. Janie showed him a gold pencil which Sabina was going to give as a souvenir to Mrs. Reid (who had flatly refused the offer of a present in money, following the instructions of her master); and Lindsay, as he bade good-bye to these two friends, and was setting forth to return to his solitary lodging, could hardly help reflecting that the old Scotch housekeeper was to be the lucky—and probably indifferent—owner of a trinket which he would have valued at a thousand pounds and more, if Sabina had given it to him of her own free accord.

CHAPTER XLIV

A REVELATION

He was so preoccupied with his own thoughts on leaving the house that he almost ran against a man who came up to the little gate just as he was opening it.

'Hallo, what are you doing here?' the stranger said, in surly and semi-drunken tones.

He did not recognise the voice.

'Yes, I like this! I think this is pretty cool! What are you coming about here for?'

Lindsay's first impulse was to seize the fellow by the neck and kick him into the middle of the road; and undoubtedly that was what would have happened but that the man staggered forward a step, bringing his face more into the faint light sent along from a lamp at the corner. Then a flash of horror went through Lindsay's frame, striking him motionless, stupefying him, and leaving him only with the instinctive determination to bar the way against this drunken wretch's entrance into Sabina's home. That was all he could think off; there was no time to readjust other matters in his own mind; how to get this man away quietly—that was the immediate thing.

'I should think you had a longer story to tell than I have,' Lindsay said, with an affectation of good-humour. 'Come, let us go over to the Checkers and have a drink.'

'The Checkers? Not I. I'm a dead man.' Then he added, with a bit of a guttural laugh, 'But it would be worth a fiver to walk in all the same. Wouldn't old Mother What's-her-name shriek? Wouldn't her ribbons stand on end?'

The case was growing desperate, for the women within might hear this talking at the gate. And if drink would not entice him away, what would? Of a sudden Lindsay remembered what Janie had told him as to the ordinary motive of Foster's visits hither.

'What have you come back for? Money?'

'What's that to you?' he said, with a sudden return to his sulky manner. 'And what are you doing here? That's what I want to know.'

'Because, if it was money, I would lend you a hundred or two—if you knew of a good horse to back.'

Foster hesitated.

'Walk down to the station with me, and we will talk it over,' Lindsay put in dexterously; and then he passed out, quietly shutting the gate, and the two men set out along the dark road.

'Money from you?' Foster said, with a mock assumption of dignity. 'No. I can make money for myself. What do you take me for? What do I want with your money? But I won't bear any malice. You were a kind of sweetheart of my wife's before she married, weren't you? Oh well, that's all right. And she's all right. Cæsar's wife—above suspicion—that's all right. But I'll tell you what I'll do for you—I'll put you on to something—been a moral ever since the weights were out. I wonder at you fellows who have money and get no fun for it. What's yours in? Consols, I suppose. Ground-rents and rubbish of that kind—buried in a grave. Well, you give me the two hundred, three hundred, five hundred, what you like; and you'll just see something on the 17th of March next. Lend me the money, and you'll see what's what. It's Wednesday the 17th of March that's got to make a man of me. I've been under a cloud long enough. I'm going to emerge then—emerge is the word—in splendour. Then she can make it up with Sir Anthony. If she doesn't, I don't care. I shall have made him serve my turn—and he may kick up any shindy he likes—it won't hurt me——'

Lindsay let him babble on in this way almost unheeded; he was busy with his own rapid plans. For if only he could carry Foster up to London with him, there and then, he

could get Sabina to set out forthwith for Buckinghamshire, where she would be safe from persecution. That she knew that Foster was alive he did not doubt; clearly that was the story she had to tell to Janie. Of course it was all a mystery to him as yet; the one definite thing before him was to try to give her the chance of reaching some haven of shelter. Nor did it occur to him that he was assuming a remarkably bold and unusual responsibility in thus interposing to keep separate husband and wife. For one thing, he had had no time to reflect. It came naturally to him to think of Sabina first; she was to be guarded whatever else happened. And for another thing, he hardly considered the creature beside him to be a man at all—certainly not one whose wishes, projects, or affairs could be regarded as of any account whatever, so long, at least, as he could be kept out of the way.

He looked at his watch, the clear starlight just enabling him to make out the time.

'That's bad luck. Just missed it!' he said.

'Missed what?' his companion said vaguely.

'Oh well, you see, as this transaction may be a big thing, and as I know next to nothing of racing matters, I thought you might have run up to town with me, and had a bit of dinner somewhere, to talk it over. But wait a moment—I have not heard the train pass—perhaps it's late—come along, we may catch it yet.'

He did not wait for the other's consent; and Foster's mind was too concentrated on the prospect of getting this money to perceive that he was being hurried off to London in spite of himself.

'Yes, there she comes!' Lindsay cried—having just caught sight of a red flare coming rapidly through the darkness. 'Hurry up!—we shall just do it.'

He had but a second in which to get his ticket; then he noticed that as Foster quickly crossed the platform he held his handkerchief to his face; the next moment these two were in a railway-carriage, by themselves, on their way to London.

Perhaps this hurried rush had sobered Foster a little.

'I say, what's all this about?' he said rather angrily,

and as if he were awaking out of a stupor. 'What's the use of going to London? I didn't come down here to go right back to London—like a fool. I wanted explanations —oh yes, I can tell you I mean to have matters cleared up now. It was all very well when I was over at Nice—capital excuse getting no letters—but that won't do now. Look here, what is the good of rushing away like this?'

And then he seemed to try to pull himself together.

'Oh yes. The money. That's business. It's business if you mean business——'

'Of course, I want to talk it over,' Lindsay said. 'That's but natural.'

'Don't you expect me to blab,' Foster said, with a gleam of cunning in the bedazzled eyes. 'I know when I've had an extra drink. It was after the long journey—and the beastly cold—and some of the boys were about last night. But I don't blab. No horse's name will pass my lips, not though I was blind. A fine thing you would make of it, rushing into the open market, and bawling the animal's name all over the place. If you want the thing done on the quiet, then you must trust to me. There's more in it than you think—it's a great game that's being played—you stand in with us—you won't regret it—casting your bread upon the waters, that's what it is——'

The last sentences had been mumbled; then he turned his head to the corner; and almost directly was fast asleep.

And now Lindsay had time to think of Sabina, and of himself, and of certain wistful hopes that had been thus rudely dispelled. Many things were now clear enough to him, especially the coldness with which she had received him on his first visit to Witstead. It was the sudden peril of her child that had startled her out of that repellent attitude; she was glad to have his help in her time of sore need; nor had she shown herself ungrateful. But what could Sabina mean by saying that, when he knew everything, he would probably consider her as no longer fit to be his friend—that he would pass her by as a stranger? That was so very likely! Even supposing that she had lent herself a party to this deception—well, doubtless she had sufficient reasons. How had he suffered by it? He

had nothing to forgive. If he had known that Foster was alive, he would have been every whit as glad and eager to be of every possible service to her for her own sake. It was not as her lover that he had brought flowers for the little grave. It was not as her lover that he was now carrying off this semi-drunken creature to London, to give her time to escape into Buckinghamshire.

As for himself—well, that did not much matter. He had grown accustomed to think that life was rather a disappointing kind of thing, a useless kind of thing. But the meetings of the Monks of St. Giles in the New York hotel were amusing. And some one there had told him that the coast of New Granada offered some striking material for the landscape-painter. Perhaps he could get one or two companions to make a small party of exploration? Anyhow, a trip across the Atlantic would be a break; and the evenings in the smoking-room were snug, with the humours of the merry bagmen in their playing of poker or getting up of raffles.

Then he came back to his unconscious companion, and fell to wondering how a wretched rag of existence like this could hold any power of terrorism over such a woman as Sabina. That he had frightened her into concealing the fact of his being alive was pretty evident; though towards what end Lindsay could not imagine. Sabina, who used to be so resolute and independent and full of a happy audacity, to be overmastered and subjugated by a weakling like this! Why, now, how easy it would be to take him up and throw him out of the window! Who would be any the worse? The world would be the gainer. Of course they would call it murder; and murder is not a thing that a well-regulated person ought to contemplate; only whimsical fancies sometimes come unbidden into the head. On the other hand, if it had not been for the stories Janie had told him, he could almost have felt some compunction for this poor wretch, who looked so horribly ill. Nor was there anything in his appearance to suggest that he was merely suffering from the consequences of a drinking-bout. Indeed, the curiously bedazzled look of the eyes—which Lindsay had noticed before his companion went to sleep—and the

pale and hollow cheeks now visible in the dull light of the lamp seemed to speak rather of the use of some poisonous drug than of drink. In any case, Lindsay, who had been forming his own plans as he sat and looked at this poor creature, did not anticipate any formidable antagonism—beyond, possibly, the ebullitions of fractious temper; and he was quite prepared to humour these.

When they got to Waterloo Station Foster woke up—looking dazed and stupid and helpless. Lindsay called a hansom.

'Wait a minute—I must have a B. and S.,' the former said.

'Nonsense, man—just before dinner—you'll blow your head off!'

'I know what'll put me straight,' he said, as Lindsay followed him into the refreshment-room, to keep an eye on him.

'Oh, you needn't imagine I drink. I don't. I couldn't afford it. I've got my living to earn, somehow. But my nerve isn't what it used to be. How could you expect it? A run of bad luck like mine would ruin anybody's nerve; because, of course, you get anxious to make the most of a chance when it comes in your way. Why, at the pigeon-shooting match at Monaco the other day, I should have been in third for the championship if I had only steadied myself with a good stiff brandy-and-soda before the last shot. A horrible miss—because I was in a ghastly funk, I suppose. Well, here's better luck!'

Now the effect of this drink was speedily apparent in an unexpected way. He ceased those wandering confidences to one who was almost a stranger to him; he became quite watchful and wide awake; by the time they had reached the Gaiety Restaurant and secured a private room there, and when he had made a plentiful use of cold water in the lavatory, he appeared to have shaken off his stupefaction altogether. In the meantime Lindsay had withdrawn for a few moments to send off a couple of telegrams—one to his housekeeper's substitute at Notting Hill; the other to Janie, begging her to see that Sabina set out at once for Buckinghamshire, and to retain Mrs. Reid at Witstead.

'So you have been on the Riviera?' he said to Foster, when he returned to the room.

And now he perceived that Foster was regarding him in a scrutinising way, as if for the first time he was realising how he came to be in a restaurant in London, with a former rival as his host.

'Oh yes,' he said, with affected carelessness. 'There was plenty going on there. Steeple-chasing at Nice—pigeon-shooting——'

'And the tables at Monte Carlo?'

'No,' Foster said coldly. 'I am not such an ass. Of course, if I had plenty of money, I should enjoy an occasional plunge; but the percentage against you is a kind of mechanical thing that there's no use fighting. The truth is, I went to Nice as a kind of business trip. There's some one there who is a partner of mine—at least she's in the same swim; and I had to go and see her.'

And then he looked still more scrutinisingly at Lindsay.

'I say, my good friend, how did you come to be at Witstead this evening?'

'My good friend, as you put it, that is a very odd question,' Lindsay observed; and he met the other's look with one that plainly said, 'Utter a word of suspicion, and I'll fell you.' It was an odd position for two men who were just about to sit down to dine with each other. 'Still, if you wish to know, I happened to pay an afternoon call. My headquarters at present are at Burford Bridge—I am painting there. I have been a good deal over at Witstead during this time of trouble—where one might have expected to find you, I think. However, you may have had your reasons for remaining away; but when I called on Janie and Mrs. Foster this afternoon, imagining that Mrs. Foster was a widow and not a wife—though I should have called in any case, and, I hope, parted good friends with her—well, if there was any mistake, you know where the blame lies.'

He spoke very clearly; here, evidently, was a man who did not mean to be bullied. Foster mumbled out something about the folly of taking a simple question seriously; and at this moment the waiter appeared, bringing in the soup.

'Now to business,' said Foster, who apparently had become quite sober, though there was still a curious half-bewildered look in his eyes. 'I tell you, I have a good thing—how much do you propose to put into it?'

'That would depend on the inducement, and on the reasonable safety of it,' was the very unsportsmanlike answer.

'I don't know what you mean by reasonable safety,' Foster said peevishly. 'We're not talking about Bank of England shares; we're talking about racing. If the thing was an absolute certainty, where would you get the odds? Do you mean business or not?—or have I come away up here on a wild-goose chase?'

'I hope not; but I want to know a little more clearly how the land lies,' said Lindsay, who really was considering what excuse could be made for detaining him in town.

'I won't tell you the name of the horse.'

'It would be no use to me if you did.'

'I will tell you the race if you like—the Lincolnshire Handicap, 17th March, there you are; and there you will be, landing a pile if you stand in with us. But we want the money now, when we can get good prices; and I will fairly tell you that the game is to be played on the principle of no questions asked. That's honest now. That's your risk. And I won't promise you that, if the horse wins, you will be paid the odds you would find quoted in the market at this present moment. What would content you now?'

'I really don't know,' Lindsay said, 'for I am quite in the dark in such matters. But that would make it all the more simple—I mean, if I went in at all, I should go in to it as a pure gamble, and leave the whole thing to you. If I attempted to hedge, or anything of that kind, I should doubtless make a complete mess of it. No; I am inclined to go in blindfold; or rather, I am inclined to let you go in for me.'

'To what tune?'

'I should want a little time about that. Where could I see you to-morrow?'

'I will call on you any hour you like. It will be two hundred, anyway.'

Lindsay hesitated. He knew quite well that it was as likely as not he would never see a farthing of his money again—he had seen too often in his life the result of these 'good things' and 'morals.' But it was necessary that the inducement hung before Foster's eyes to keep him in town for perhaps several days should be sufficiently large. Two hundred pounds?—it seemed a pity to throw it away. Then he thought of Sabina, safe in the shelter of the old man's house down in Buckinghamshire.

'Yes, I think I can guarantee two hundred,' he said. 'Give me your address and I will telegraph to you to-morrow when to come and see me, if you can make it convenient. I suppose you will be in town all day.'

Foster pencilled his address on an envelope, and Lindsay put it in his pocket. For that next day, at all events, there was security.

Thereafter, during the course of the little banquet, Fred Foster endeavoured to make himself very amiable, perhaps out of gratitude for this promise of money. He ate next to nothing, and drank very little; but the little he did drink had an effect on him that Lindsay could not in the least understand. He relapsed into his maundering garrulity; and then grew comatose; and finally got up and said that as he had suffered terribly from sleeplessness of late, and now felt that he could drop off at once, he would go straight home and go to bed. Lindsay was not loth to see him depart; probably no two more ill-assorted comrades ever sat down at one table together. And then he also went home.

CHAPTER XLV

CONSPIRATORS

LINDSAY did not sleep well that night; and next morning he was up betimes, and off by an early train to Witstead. During those restless hours he had begun to doubt. Perhaps his interference at such a crisis was just a little high-handed, and might provoke resentment? Perhaps Sabina ought to know why he had urged her immediate leaving for Buckinghamshire? Indeed, there were a hundred plausible reasons why he should go down and consult Janie, and see that Sabina was got safely away. But he rather strove to conceal from himself the real reason, which was this: he wished Sabina to understand that, despite the knowledge he had just acquired, he was just as much her faithful friend as ever. To pass her by without recognition? That was not likely.

There was another thing which he tried to hide from himself, or to forget—and that was the tragic hopelessness of the whole situation. What was her future life to be? And his own? Perhaps there was nothing dramatically pathetic in his position—no definite sorrow to be met and conquered—no sudden blow of evil fortune to be faced. A gray waste of years makes no particular appeal to the human heart. And indeed, for his own part, he deliberately avoided looking at any such prospect. The immediate details he made matters of importance; and strove to confine his attention to them. As soon as he knew when Sabina could start, he would telegraph to the Red Lion Hotel, High Wycombe, asking the landlord to have a conveyance ready to take her to Missenden. And then,

as regarded himself? Well, he went no further than the meetings of the Monks of St. Giles in New York. These were quite merry and pleasant. But his face looked rather pallid and worn as he sat in the railway-carriage, and absently looked at the passing landscape.

When he reached the cottage he asked for Janie; and presently Janie appeared—looking scared and breathless.

'Oh, Mr. Lindsay, I have something dreadful to say to you,' she broke in at once, before he could make any excuse for his visit. 'Sabie has told me everything at last. After you left last night she was in a dreadful way—she was crying—and saying she had never received such kindness from any human being as from you—and that you would despise her—and—and—be ashamed to think you had ever made her your friend. And then she told me—what she had intended to tell you, but she hadn't the courage——'

'Yes,' said he, coming to her aid, for he could see how agitated she was, 'but don't vex yourself about it. I know the whole story. I had the honour of Mr. Fred Foster's company at dinner last night.'

She stared at him—he seemed to take the matter so quietly.

'I met him at the gate as I was going away——'

'We heard some people talking,' she said, breathlessly.

'And as I thought he was drunk I coaxed him into going back to London. I admit it was rather a cool thing to do, but I don't see how any harm can come of it. He got a good dinner; and went off home a little more sober than when I found him—not that I say he was really drunk—I fancy he was as much stupefied as anything else.'

'But,' said Janie, in a bewildered way, 'but you are not angry with Sabie?'

'Angry? On what account?'

'For allowing us all to think he was dead.'

'I suppose she had sufficient reasons.'

'Ah, didn't I tell her you would say that!' Janie exclaimed triumphantly. 'Didn't I say you would pass a charitable judgment on anything she did.'

'But I do not wish to judge her at all,' he said calmly.

'And you don't want to be told why it was that Sabie allowed such a thing?'

'I certainly don't ask to be told,' he answered. 'I assume that you know her reasons. Yet you don't seem to have fallen out with her. And why should I presume to be her judge in any case?'

'Perhaps you don't know how she values your good opinion,' Janie said. And then she hesitated. 'Yes, I suppose you would be content to say, "Well, whatever it was that happened, Sabie did what was right," and you would ask nothing further about it. But if I were to let you go away like that, I know what she would say—she would say, "Ah, you dared not tell him—you were afraid to see what he would think of me—you hesitated because you knew you would be cutting adrift from me the best of all my friends." You understand, Mr. Lindsay, that she is far more sensitive now than she used to be—her troubles and her living alone have altered her a good deal—and if you only knew how anxious she is you should not think hardly of her—'

It was clear that Janie herself was considerably anxious, if her face told a true tale.

'She says a woman would understand her position a little better—and perhaps forgive her; but not you.'

'I never heard yet,' said he, 'that a man was likely to be more uncharitable towards a woman than another woman would be. I should have thought it would be the other way about.'

'Supposing,' Janie said, rather tremblingly, and she fixed her eyes on him, 'supposing that Sabie was accused of—of —obtaining money on false pretences?'

'I should not believe it,' he said simply.

'But—but if it was true? I suppose nothing would excuse it? You would never forgive her—a man would never forgive her?'

She was regarding him with piteous eyes.

'Now that you have told me so much, you must tell me the whole,' he said. 'Who makes such an accusation?'

'It was her own phrase—the very words she used

when she was putting everything as harshly as it could be put, and then challenging me to say that you would not think ill of her. And if I tell you the story now—if I tell it badly—so that you have no sympathy with her, I am frightened——'

'You need not be frightened,' he said. 'None of us who have known her are likely to think hardly of her, whatever she has done.'

'And indeed it was all Foster's doing!' Janie pleaded earnestly. 'He terrified her into it. He was at his wits' end for money. He declared that there was but the one chance to save him from utter ruin. Then he got her to go to Sir Anthony—but that was no use—and she knew it would be no use. Foster was desperate; Sabina herself does not understand what scheme he had on foot, but he was determined to get some money somehow; and so he made sure that if notice of his death were sent to Sir Anthony, there would be some provision made for the supposed widow. And do you know how he forced her into it? He swore on oath that if she didn't help him in that way he would take the boy away with him to Australia, as soon as the law allowed him to do that, and that she would never see either of them again. It wasn't the first time he had made the threat—he had made it before—and, oh, Mr. Lindsay, if you had seen Sabie the day she came to us to tell us—it was terrible, terrible! I never saw any one so wild with alarm and despair. Just the one thing she lived for to be taken out of her life! Of course Phil told her that Foster could not do such a thing just then; but she said it was all the more horrible to be looking forward to it when the boy would be her only companion. She says herself she thinks she must have been half mad; she clung to the little boy so; and she was in such terror. Foster did it all. He had an advertisement of his death put in a Yorkshire paper; and all she did was to send that to Sir Anthony and to us, and ask us not to come down for a time. When Sir Anthony and I did come down, she was like a stone. And of course neither of us pretended to offer her sympathy; I suppose both of us were secretly glad that the wretch was gone. Sir Anthony

gave her a cheque there and then; and he doubled her allowance—making it what it was before her marriage; of course every farthing of that—every farthing she could scrape together—being claimed by that scoundrel. Now that is the whole extent of it—and it was all done under the terrorism about the taking away of the little boy. Mr. Lindsay,' said Janie, at the end of this appeal, and her eyes were filled with tears, 'you're not going to give up Sabie?—you're not going to ask me to tell her that you are no longer her friend?'

'I am sure you will tell her nothing of the kind—so long as my friendship is of any use to her,' he said. 'It is a pitiable story. I suppose in her present state she exaggerates her share in it. And so she thinks a man would take a less charitable view of it than a woman? Well, I don't know about that. I think a man can see what her situation was just as well as a woman;—a very miserable and unhappy situation that one naturally wishes she had never found herself in——'

'But it's your forgiveness she seeks for,' said Janie, timidly.

'My forgiveness!' he repeated. 'I refuse to utter a single word of blame.'

Then Janie laughed through her tears.

'Ah, didn't I say that!—when she wouldn't believe me. And she is making all the reparation she can,' Janie added eagerly. 'You see the death of the poor little boy left her free. Foster has no longer any hold over her. She won't take another penny of any kind from her father; as soon as she gets down into Buckinghamshire she is going to write to him and confess everything and give up the whole of her allowance. Old Mr. Foster is only too glad to have her go and live with him; and Sabie never had expensive habits. Then as for her husband I suppose the old gentleman can easily prevent his coming about the place—Fred Foster will now be entirely dependent on him.'

She glanced at him anxiously.

'I don't know how it is,' she said, 'but always you seem to bring strength and calmness with you—and a sense of safety. This morning when I woke I thought everything

was at its worst; there did not seem a glimpse of hope anywhere; and even when I thought of you, it was with a kind of fear—for I was not quite sure—I was not quite so sure as I pretended to be to Sabie. But now, now you will let me tell her you don't think so badly of her——'

'That is not the message,' said he. 'If you think she cares for my opinion at all, you may tell her that I quite understand how she was driven to give an unwilling consent, and that I have no blame for her—none.'

'It will be one little bit of happiness for her,' said Janie. 'And I suppose she will be safe from his persecution down there. It's little he knows why she was so tame and obedient before. That is all over now. And that of itself is something. But,' she added wistfully, 'I had been looking forward to a very different future for our Sabie.'

'You got my telegram last night, I suppose?' he said.

'Yes; and I shall be as glad to get away as she will. Fancy if Foster were to come down and find me here!'

'Well, is he a person to be afraid of? But I will see to that. He will not come down here until you are both of you away. When can you go?'

'The few things will be packed to-day; and I think we can leave to-morrow morning.'

'Very well; you needn't be afraid of Foster coming down,' said he. 'Then I suppose you know what to do. Sabina will tell you whether it is to High Wycombe or to Prince's Risborough you should telegraph to have a trap waiting. And of course you will telegraph to Missenden as well. I suppose it is too much to ask that you should go with her all the way?'

'But I have Phil's strict orders!' Janie exclaimed. 'I am not to leave her until she is comfortably settled in her new home.'

'Oh, that is all right,' he said. 'I shall be glad to have a line from you when everything has been arranged.'

He rose to go.

'And you?' said Janie.

He understood well enough the meaning of this half-frightened question; but he only answered carelessly: 'Oh well, I have still some things to get finished up at

Burford Bridge. And I have been thinking of running down to Scotland for a few days, to put my small affairs in order. After that—I don't know.'

'I will write as soon as Sabie is settled in Buckinghamshire,' Janie said. 'I suppose you would not care to see her now? No; it would be better not. She is very much upset; and I should like to prepare her—oh, she will be so glad to know that you still think well and kindly of her! There is not any one whose opinion she values so much.'

'Make her mind perfectly clear about that, then,' he said, in parting; and then he left the house and returned to London.

This was an objectless kind of day, somehow. He did not know what to do with himself. He could find no employment in his studio. He walked along to the Arts Club; and dawdled away some time there, reading magazines, smoking, chatting to casual droppers-in. Then he went out into the melancholy dusk of the London afternoon; and wandered about the streets and squares; watching here and there the golden gleam of a newly-lit gas-lamp suddenly shoot through the gray. Finally, he got back to the Club again, ordered a bit of dinner, and sat down at a small table by himself—which was not his usual way, for he had heaps of friends and acquaintances.

One of these came into the room.

'Hello, Lindsay, all alone? What's the matter?—you're looking rather glum. And yet you shouldn't be. Of course you've heard what they're prophesying about you?'

'I have heard nothing—I have been down in the country.'

'You don't mean to say you haven't heard that there is a knighthood being got ready for you? Don't you know that —— talks of resigning; then, as a matter of certainty, the Society will elect you their new President; and every one says the Queen will rise to the occasion. My congratulations, Sir Walter!'

The recipient of this news did not seem to take much interest in it, however; perhaps the contingency was too remote; perhaps the Lindsays of Carnryan could afford to be indifferent about any such decoration.

'I will join you—to the extent of a sherry-and-bitters,' said this amiable newcomer, drawing in a chair. 'But what is the matter really? You look very depressed.'

'I have reason to be depressed,' Lindsay said, 'and I will tell you what it is. Either to-night or to-morrow morning I have to meet a man; and my difficulty will be to keep from murdering him. If I murder him it will be bad for me; if I don't it will be a distinct disservice to the country in which the hound is allowed to live. That's all.'

'What has he done to you?'

'Nothing to me.'

'Oh, nonsense, people don't take such violent dislikes for nothing—unless you're chaffing. Or is there a woman in the affair?'

'There is, in a way,' Lindsay answered frankly. 'It is his conduct to his wife that beats anything in the way of meanness—meanness and brutality—that was ever heard of. If I were to tell you here, now, you would want to kick him across the Square and back again, and along down Oxford Street until your boots gave out. And the infernal ruffian dined with me last night! I didn't know the fifteenth part of what he had done. And he dined with me—sat at the same table!'

Lindsay had begun his story in the ordinary tone of club persiflage, but there was a darker light gathering in his eyes. His companion hesitated for an instant, and then made bold to say: 'My good friend, pray excuse me. I don't want to intermeddle, but I would strongly advise you to come out of that. It is a very dangerous position. When a man has strong sympathy with a married woman who has been injured, and would like to kick and cowhide the husband—mind, I am not speaking of this particular case—but I have noticed that mischief generally comes of it. You of all people, too! You know the kind of talk that goes on about everybody. Well, I never heard your name coupled with the name of a woman even in the most innocent way. Oh yes, there was once, of course. You were pretty badly hit that time; but I suppose you have forgotten all about it now. Let me see, what was her name? The beautiful tall girl with the splendid hair who

came once or twice to Mrs. Mellord's. She lived down in Kensington Square with some old people——'

'I know whom you mean,' said Lindsay, shortly.

'But you have forgotten her name! Lord, Lord, what faithfulness there is in man!'

'Her name was then Miss Zembra. I will ask you not to say anything further about her.'

'Her name then? Oh yes, I think I remember something about her getting married.' And then he seemed to be struck with some sudden fancy, and he looked quickly at Lindsay. 'I say, Lindsay, you don't mean that——'

He stopped; and his silence was more significant than words. He dared not even ask whether the Miss Zembra of that time was the married woman whose injuries were now appealing to Lindsay's sympathy, and to his indignation and anger. But the sherry-and-bitters was finished. He rose.

'Of course anything I said was only in chaff,' he remarked. 'But men do get into scrapes in the most innocent way. And anybody going down to Windsor to be knighted would have to have a pretty clean record, as the saying is.'

'Murder might be objected to?' Lindsay said, looking up.

'If I were you I wouldn't see that man, either to-night or to-morrow morning,' his acquaintance said. 'Just you take care. There can be no harm in giving you so much advice. Ta-ta! I'm going to dine at the —— Restaurant; and Lord have mercy on my soul!'

But Lindsay was not much alarmed. Having finished with dinner, he went upstairs to the smoking-room, and there, after some deliberation, wrote a note to Fred Foster, asking him to call at his (Lindsay's) studio the next day at noon; the money would then be waiting for him. He despatched this note by a commissionaire a little after eight o'clock; and he guessed that it was not likely Foster would think of going down to Witstead at so late an hour; while, as for the following morning, he would have to be in London at least until twelve.

CHAPTER XLVI

A KEEPSAKE

PUNCTUALLY at noon Fred Foster arrived, and was shown through the house and through the garden to the studio. Lindsay was standing with his back to the fire, smoking his pipe. When he heard the footsteps outside he said to himself, 'Now, can I keep my hands off the scoundrel? Can I leave England without telling him what a coward and sneak he is? Is it to be kicking? Or breaking a stick across his back?' But the instant the door was opened all that vanished from his mind. Contempt, pure and simple, took its place. He regarded this miserable creature with loathing, not with anger; briefly bade him good-morning; and then turned to stir the fire so as to avoid the necessity of shaking hands.

'Snug quarters on a cold morning like this,' said Mr. Foster, in a friendly and familiar way. 'You are lucky fellows who can live in a dreamland of your own, instead of being buffeted about the world——'

'I have the money ready for you,' Lindsay said curtly, and he walked across the room to his writing-desk.

'Of course you understand I don't take it as a loan,' Foster remarked, with some little assumption of dignity. 'I take it on commission. If it was a loan I would give you my I O U for it——'

'I will not trouble you,' said Lindsay, with marked coldness.

Foster glanced at him with a twinkle of anger in his half-dazed eyes. 'Supercilious beast!' was doubtless in his mind; but there was a vision of a pale blue cheque before

him, and that kept him respectful. All he said was, 'Of course you won't, for I don't mean to. I take the money on commission, as I say; and I explained to you the other night that, if the horse wins, you mustn't expect to be paid the odds that are now quoted in the market. You will get a percentage on the money—that is all; but I daresay it will be handsome enough to satisfy you, if we pull the thing off.'

Lindsay handed him the cheque without a word; it was a heavy price to pay—but by this time Sabina would be on her way down into Buckinghamshire.

'With anything like luck,' Foster said, as he folded up the cheque and put it in his pocket, 'I ought to be able to return you a little slip of paper with considerably bigger figures on it. And I think we are pretty safe this journey. It's about time something was coming my way—I've had such a cursed run of luck as never was heard of in the world before. And if we do pull it off this time, it will be to a pretty tune, I promise you; it's going to be a big thing, one way or the other; just you wait to see what the 17th of March will bring forth.'

'In the meantime,' said Lindsay, 'when are you going down to Witstead?'

Foster stared, as much as to say, 'What's that to you?'

'Because,' Lindsay continued, 'I should like you to make arrangements to let my housekeeper come back home again as soon as possible.'

'Your housekeeper? What is she doing there?'

'If you had been in your own house while your child was ill, you would know,' was the answer. 'The little girl was afraid of the fever—or her people were—and she left. It was necessary to have some one at once; and I sent my housekeeper down. It is time she was home again.'

'Well, why doesn't my wife let her go?' said he.

'As I understand it, Mrs. Foster was going down to your father's; and my housekeeper was to remain in charge of the place until you showed up—that was the arrangement, I believe.'

'My wife going down to Buckinghamshire?' he exclaimed. 'Who told you that?'

'Mrs. Drexel.'

'Oh, but she shan't! I'll stop that. We'll soon put an end to that manœuvre!'

Lindsay looked at him curiously; and with patience. Indeed, there was no cause for any disquietude now. Sabina would be on her way to Wycombe by this time; in an hour or two she would be safe in her new home. And so this poor weakling of a creature—with the shaky fingers, and dazed eyes, and half-bemused brain—imagined that he had still a hold over Sabina, when he could no longer terrify her with threats of taking away her child? It was amusing, in a way. Did he think it was his force of character? Or the majesty of the law behind him? Well, undoubtedly the majesty of the law was behind him; but his own pecuniary interests were of more immediate importance to him; and Lindsay did not anticipate that the old gentleman in Missenden would find much difficulty in inducing his worthy son to leave Sabina in peace.

'Well, I'm off,' said the gentleman with the cheque in his pocket. 'Much obliged for your confidence. Hope you won't find it misplaced.'

This time it was the opening of the studio-door that relieved Lindsay of the necessity of shaking hands.

'Good-morning—I suppose you will be able to find your way out?'

'Oh yes—don't you trouble. Good-morning!'

It was the last time these two ever saw each other.

And then Lindsay began his preparations for going away somewhere; for he had grown tired of England, and wished for a change. He was fond of travel and fresh scenes; and he could find occupation for himself wherever he went. So first of all he returned to Burford Bridge, and finished up his work there; then he made a journey northward to his native Kingdom of Galloway, and saw that his small belongings in that famous county were being properly looked after; and finally he engaged a berth in a White Star liner. New York was to be his first objective point.

And yet he did not like the idea of leaving England without saying good-bye to Sabina—any more than he liked the idea of presenting himself before her a solitary

and unsummoned visitor. He went to Janie about it.

'I know quite well,' he said, 'that I was of some little service to her down there in Surrey. But she may think I am pressing too much of a claim on the strength of that.'

'Then it's little you understand Sabie,' Janie answered promptly. 'And what is more—if you have any regard for her at all, you won't leave the country without going to see her. She will never believe that she is fully reinstated in your good opinion unless you do that. Of course I told her all you said—and very glad and very grateful she was—but assurances of that kind coming from a third person are never quite satisfactory. Mr. Lindsay, you will go and see Sabie!'

'She might think it strange, my going there alone,' he said doubtfully.

'Will you go if she asks you?'

'Most certainly!'

'Then wait till the day after to-morrow.'

On the morning indicated by Janie there came to him a very friendly—if rather timid—little note from Sabina, saying she had heard from Janie that he was leaving England for some time, and intimating that if it was not altogether too inconvenient for him, she would like to have an opportunity of bidding him good-bye. He sought out a time-table; there was a train at eleven o'clock. And so, in due course, he found himself on his way to Prince's Risborough; for he thought he would like to have a walk across the Chiltern hills, to have a last look at an English landscape; besides, that would time his arrival at Great Missenden for about five o'clock, when he could not incommode the unknown household in any way.

The journey down was uninteresting, for a cold gray mist robbed the landscape of any colour it might otherwise have had. But perhaps his eyes were busy with other things than those visible through the carriage-window. It seemed to him as if he was bent on a double leavetaking—this was a last look at England, and a last good-bye to Sabina too.

Arrived at Prince's Risborough Station, he asked for some

scrap of lunch at the refreshment-room there, but they could give him nothing. They suggested that if he went on to the village, he might fare better at the George.

'If it's only bread and cheese,' he said to himself, as he set out again, 'I must have something.' For he was not going to have Sabina inconvenienced by the appearance of a hungry visitor.

Great, however, and unexpected was his good fortune at the George—a small inn in the main thoroughfare of this dead-alive and melancholy village. He suddenly found himself in the land of Canaan; for there was a market ordinary going on in the principal room; and they got a place for him with great politeness, and made him very welcome at the bountiful feast. Indeed this was not the first time by many that he had noticed the good fellowship and friendliness and courtesy shown by a number of strangers thrown together in an English inn: a courtesy of which he had never seen the like in any other country he had visited; and he had been a considerable traveller. So far from each man attending solely to his own wants, and gulping his food as if he was running to catch a train, there was a general helpfulness that was almost obtrusive; and there was an air of leisurely comfort about the proceedings, as if each man knew that his dogcart was outside, awaiting his good pleasure. And he liked the wholesome and healthy and sturdy look of these elderly farmers—with their silver-gray whiskers and ruddy complexion, their clear blue eyes, and their deliberate, strongly-accentuated, masculine speech. Their humour was not very subtle, perhaps; their political views were robust and definite rather than learned; and plain common sense and attention to the substantial facts of life were doubtless more in their way than a gay facetiousness; nevertheless, judging by a tolerably wide experience, this type of character was very grateful to Walter Lindsay, who had long ago arrived at the conviction that the clever, shallow, conceited, ignorant, believing-in-nothing London cockney is the most degraded and contemptible of all God's creatures—if such he may properly be called.

Then he set out to climb the Chilterns, keeping to the

right of the great white cross which, cut on the chalk slope, is visible all the way from Oxford. The conditions were not favourable for his last look round. A pale mist hung along the hills; the wintry woods and hedges were colourless, but for here and there a bit of green holly or russet beech; the sky was monotonously gray. And yet when he reached the top, and turned to regard the great plain stretched out beneath him—with its farmhouses, and fields, and copses, and roads all phantom-like in the prevailing haze—it was with not a little regret that he knew this was a leavetaking. He had a great affection for England; if he was born a Scotchman, it was in England he had lived the most of his life, and done the best of his work. And who more faithfully than himself had studied her moods and ways—and communed with her in secret places—and got to know her elusive charm? For the beauty of English landscape has subtleties that none but the painter knows; and it is only after patient habitude that these are revealed even to him; often enough, moreover, when he has caught and transferred to paper or canvas something of this coy graciousness, the result is quite disappointing to the ordinary spectator, accustomed to the obvious characteristics of Italian terraces, Swiss mountains, Highland glens, and the like. The chromo-lithographer is not at home in the English counties—or, at best, he goes up to Westmoreland, where he can get a nice, handy, portable edition of lake and mountain scenery, all within easy compass, and all of guaranteed prettiness.

Up here, on the summit of the hill, the roads were filled with snow and half-melted ice, which made it difficult walking; so, where it was practicable, he made a path for himself through the leafless beech-woods. It was strangely still in these solitudes; there seemed to be no work going on at any of the farms; the remotest sounds were plainly audible in the hushed air. His own footsteps, too, were noiseless on the yielding carpet of withered leaves; there was not a sign of life anywhere except when a jay fled shrieking through the branches, or a long-tailed magpie flapped its silent way across the fields. He could not have been more alone in the forests of Champlain.

He had carefully made out his route on the Ordnance Survey map before starting; and when at length he came in sight of a spacious mansion, standing at the summit of a noble avenue that sloped away down into the valley, he knew that this was Hampden House, and that here had lived the great Englishman whose refusal to pay Charles's ship-money had rung through the land as a summons to England to stand by her ancient rights and liberties. And he wondered whether they had brought his body, after the fray at Chalgrove, to be buried here; and whether they had borne it, with solemn state, up this great and silent avenue. And he wondered, too—as a landscape-painter—where, except in England, one could find such an avenue: some three hundred yards he guessed its width, and over a mile its length; of velvet turf, where the snow allowed that to be visible, and planted on each side by magnificent beeches and Spanish chestnuts. Down this avenue he made his way to the Missenden road—startling a rabbit now and again from among the withered bracken and the snow. He knew that close by was the piece of land on which the ship-money was levied: had any one thought of erecting some kind of memorial to mark so interesting a spot?

However, it was neither John Hampden, nor the ship-money, nor the fatal Chalgrove field that was in his mind when he drew near the village of Missenden. The old-fashioned house, with its red-brick wall, and tall elm-trees, and laurestinus-bushes, was pointed out to him by a passer-by; he rang the bell, and was admitted by an elderly woman, who begged him to go into the drawing-room—Mrs. Foster would be with him presently. So there he waited; glancing at the portraits and sketches on the walls; rather struck by the old-world look of the furniture and the quaint decorations; and wondering whether Sabina had as yet had time to grow quite accustomed to the quietude of her new home.

The door opened; he turned instantly—and caught sight of a pair of eyes, timid, and yet shining and placid and grateful. And this was not at all the pale Sabina he had expected to see; there was a flush of rose-red on her face—the flush of a girl of seventeen; and she came to

him quickly, with extended hand, as if her gladness at the sight of him had overcome her embarrassment.

'It is very kind of you,' she said, simply. 'Janie gave me all the messages you sent—and—and that was only more of your goodness to me; but when I heard you were going away, well, I—I—wanted to see you yourself, to make sure that you did really forgive me——'

'Yes, but we are not going to speak of that any more,' said he, gravely. 'That is all over and gone. Janie must have told you that I understood the whole situation perfectly.'

'And I am not even to thank you for being so kind?'

'There is no kindness in the matter; there may be a little common sense. Now, tell me—are you quite comfortable here? Do you like the place?'

'Yes, indeed,' she answered. 'They do everything they can think of for me, and one day is just like another; it is a peaceful life; and I wish for nothing better. Only,' she added, with downcast eyes, 'it is—very—far away—from Witstead.'

He knew what she meant; but he understood that Janie had undertaken to tend the little grave there.

'And you,' she said, 'why are you going away from England, after being home so short a time?'

Well, he began and gave her his reasons, or excuses, for going; and told her of all his plans and projects; and made the matter as cheerful as might be. Then she asked him to go into the dining-room, where old Mr. Foster, whose rheumatism was pretty bad, was seated; and they had tea there, and further talk. It was pleasant to hear Sabina's voice. And sometimes there was a smile in her eyes. He began to think that in this quiet haven she might attain to some forgetfulness of the too ungenerous past; and that the years might bring to her at least a placid content. The garden visible through the window looked somewhat dismal at present; but spring was coming; he could see Sabina among the young blossoms—in a light print dress—a pair of gardener's shears in her hand—perhaps a touch of peach-colour in her cheek—and the bright sunlight on her golden-brown hair.

The gray of the afternoon deepened; the elderly woman brought in the lamps; and then he rose.

'I have to walk to Wycombe,' he said, 'and I am not quite sure of the way—so I had better be going.'

'But you must not get astray in the dark,' Sabina said, anxiously. 'If you will wait a few minutes I will send over to the inn and get a conveyance for you—indeed, you must do that.'

'If you are not too proud to go in a pony-chaise,' old Mr. Foster said, with a laugh, 'our lad can drive you across: I'm sure the cob doesn't get half enough exercise in this weather.'

'Oh, thank you, I could not think of troubling you; but I think what Miss Ze—Mrs. Foster says is quite right—I shouldn't like to miss my way—so I'll go into the inn in passing and get a trap to take me over. I may catch an earlier train too at Wycombe.'

He spoke rapidly and confusedly; he hoped neither of them had noticed the half-stumble. But indeed she had been looking so young, and speaking in a pleased way, as in the olden days—and, also, perhaps, he was rather bewildered by the knowledge that now he was about to bid her farewell, probably for many years. He was a little breathless when he found that she came out after him into the hall.

'Mr. Lindsay,' she said—and she stood facing him in the lamplight, but with her eyes downcast—'good-bye is easily said; but if you are going away—perhaps for some years—well, I should like you to think sometimes that I don't forget, that I never, never can forget, what your friendship has been to me. Would you take a little keepsake from me—just to remind you? It was my grandfather's—my mother gave it to me.'

She timidly offered him the trinket. It was an old-fashioned ring—red gold and garnets.

He held her hand in his; and for a second he could not thank her at all.

'It will be a reminder, will it not,' she said, 'that I have not ceased to be grateful to you for all your kindness to me?'

'And if you only knew how I value it—and how I shall value it many thousands of miles away.' He did not trust himself to say more. 'Good-bye, and God bless you!'

She opened the door for him; he looked once at the tender eyes; and then was gone.

CHAPTER XLVII

A KNELL OF DOOM

ONE evening towards nine o'clock Fred Foster called at the Northern Counties Hotel, Jermyn Street, asked to see Mrs. Fairservice, and was shown upstairs to her sitting-room. Apparently she had just finished dinner; dessert was still on the table; and she had gone to the fireplace, before which she was standing, with an evening paper in her hand. She was smartly dressed; her yellow hair resplendent; and she wore a string of brilliants round her neck.

'I'm glad you've come,' she said, throwing aside the paper. 'I've plenty to tell you. And to have a jock dining with you who can neither eat, nor drink, nor speak a word unless you get it out of him with a corkscrew, isn't much fun. And I've plenty to talk about too. There, help yourself to some wine—the cigars are on the top of the piano.'

She seemed a little bit excited.

'Then that was Joe Cantly I passed in the hall?' he said.

'Yes. He's off to King's Cross.'

'I thought it looked like his figure; but he went by quickly. Well, what's the news?' he asked, pouring out some champagne with no very steady hand.

'Why, just the same old news, neither more nor less,' she said; but there was a smile of triumph about the thin, hard lips, and in the steely-blue eyes. 'Everything is going beautiful; and if I haven't got hold of Charlie Bernard this time, it's pretty queer. Oh, I don't say you haven't done your share well enough; but when my friend

Charlie goes smash, he'll have a pretty good guess who did the trick for him. And what a slice of luck it was!—the moment Joe Cantly confessed to me that I'd better not back Master of Roy, I suspected what they were up to. "Why, Joe," I said, "it's a moral, if that horse is ridden fair, and you know it is." He wouldn't answer that. "You're going to lose the race; is that Bernard's little game?" says I. But no, the mummified little creature wouldn't say one thing or another. If you only knew the trouble I had to corkscrew the truth out of him; and indeed it was only nods and winks he would give. And how cleverly they have managed it! Who would imagine that Charlie Bernard, openly backing Master of Roy to win the Lincolnshire Handicap—and the stable-money on too—was laying against the horse by commission, quietly and gently, but taking everything the public felt inclined to offer. And we are in that public, Master Freddie,' she continued, with a laugh. 'We are amongst the poor innocent gulls. We are putting our little bits on; and every one knows the favourite will win; and we're rejoicing at the prospect of the golden sovereigns being handed over, when behold! something goes wrong with Master of Roy, or Joe Cantly does a little bit of roping, and he's down at the foot of the poll or out of it altogether. The Jockey Club make a fuss; and there is a talk in the newspapers; but nothing can be proved; and in the meantime Charlie Bernard has scooped in the guineas and put himself on his legs again. Very good; that's all right.'

She rang the bell for some tea.

'I told you all the way through that Bernard was a fool,' she continued, talking rapidly and excitedly. 'His run of good luck turned his head—he thought he couldn't do wrong; then, when things did go a little bit bad with him, he lost his head the other way, and began plunging to recover himself. South African diamond mines! Do you think I should have let him touch South African diamond mines if I had had anything to do with his affairs? I couldn't have helped all his ill-luck; I couldn't have helped Trigonella going dead lame—puff went twelve hundred guineas then; but I could have told him to keep to things he knew some-

thing about. All the better for me now. He is just walking blindfold into the trap I have set for him; and when it snaps on his ankle he'll think the heavens and the earth have come to an end: 100 to 14—that's tidy odds to lay against the favourite. Listen.' She took up the paper. '"Master of Roy continues to grow in public appreciation; and Mr. Bernard is confident in his ability to win." But it's a deal safer to bet on his losing, if you can trust your jockey to rope him. Poor Joe!—you wouldn't believe the trouble I've had with him. He has always been on the square, he maintained. "Very well," says I, "why should I have any bother about persuading you to ride this race honest?" "It will be selling the guv'nor," says he, pulling a melancholy face. "Hang the guv'nor!" says I. "That's my tip—straight. Serves him right for trying to swindle the British public. What can he do to you? Nothing. You ride the horse to win; and win it must and shall: what can he complain of? Would he like to have you round on him? And can't you have your excuse ready? Tell him you meant to pull the horse—but that it got the mastery of you at the finish—anything you like: do you think he would dare to say a word? Not he!" Goodness me, the trouble I had to get a jock to promise to ride fair, who had been up till now as innocent as a babe—according to his own account! But I did it. I've got Joe Cantly as safe as the bank. And it isn't only the four thousand to nothing the horse wins—though that is a tidy little sum in itself. I've got him, I tell you—he won't play hanky-panky with me.'

She had been becoming more and more vehement, and her eyes were sparkling.

'I can see his face. Charlie Bernard is the worst loser I ever saw. I hope the barmaid will be with him—that would be best of all—and of course he'll be pretending that he is cocksure Master of Roy will come romping in—perhaps he'll be backing him for a little bit—just to show off—and make people certain that everything is fair and straight. Then he'll watch them come sweeping along—quite indifferently, you know—oh yes, quite indifferently—until the crowd takes up the cry—"Master of Roy!

Master of Roy!"—my heavens, I can see his face this moment!'

In her vehemence she snapped in two the paper-cutter she was holding in her hands; she flung the fragments in the fire. And then she turned angrily towards her companion, 'Why don't you speak! Good heavens, man, you are as bad as the jock! Haven't you got anything to say?'

Thus admonished, Fred Foster put aside his cigar for the moment; he did not seem in an alert mood.

'It will be a facer for Charlie Bernard,' he said.

'A facer?' she repeated scornfully. 'It will be eternal smash—that's more like it. And you think he will be able to weigh in on settling day? I think not. I think there will be a few little arrangements and some trifling arrears. I'll tell you what I should like to see some day—Charlie Bernard presenting himself with his jockey at the scales, and having slipped before his nose a nice little telegram from Messrs. Weatherby to the Clerk of the Course, saying that until the previous forfeits are paid, Mr. Bernard had better return to his own humble domicile. That's what they call a *dénouement;* and home he goes, horse, and jock, and all, and beats the barmaid out of spite. Well, I can't talk about it any more just now—it kindles me up a bit too much. Talk about something else. Where's your wife?'

'I told you,' he said, rather sulkily. 'She is staying with my father in Buckinghamshire.'

'Does he believe you're a dead and buried corpse?'

'No, of course not. What had he to do with it?'

'It was a pretty dangerous prank to play, my friend.'

'I was desperate,' he mumbled. 'And it served my turn anyway. It's wonderful how amenable people become when you can show them a bit of the ready in your hand. I might have had more, too, but for the little chap dying—another stroke of bad luck—then she threw the whole thing up, and that game was played out. But it served me at the time.'

'Well,' she said, in a mocking way, 'there's nothing I like so much to see as displays of natural affection. It's so awfully innocent and nice. I remember when I met you at Scarborough, I couldn't help laughing when you told me

you were a papa. Master Freddie Foster a papa! And I wondered how you would support the character. But I suppose you really were sorry when the boy died—when you found you couldn't screw any more money out of your father-in-law.'

'You may as well leave my domestic relations alone—they've got nothing to do with you.'

'Oh, you needn't be ill-tempered about it,' she said, with an affectation of gaiety. 'Come, let's hear what you're going to do when the great haul comes off. Settle up all round, go down and pacify the old man, turn farmer and grow mangold? Really I don't think you could do better. You'll never do much at the great game. You get frightened. Here, when you could get on Master of Roy at 100 to 8, you were still hesitating about every miserable fiver——'

'Well, there's no more hesitation now,' said he, rather blankly. 'Every farthing I could beg or borrow is launched in this swim; and, I must say, Johnny Russell stood by me like a man. Deane, too—well, it's wonderful how they believe in you when you can put your hand in your pocket and show them a few sovereigns.'

'What are you going to do, then, when it comes off?' she repeated. 'Is it to be the same old game?'

'The first thing is this,' said he. 'I've had a pretty baddish time of it for the last year or eighteen months—a rat in a drain-pipe sort of existence. Well, when I find myself on my legs again, I think I shall be entitled to a little amusement——'

'And there's only the one place in Europe for that,' said she, promptly, 'and that's Monte Carlo. Did you ever find a quarter of an hour hang heavy on your hands there? I never did. In the daytime walks and drives in that delicious air—or boating—or pigeon-shooting for you; music in the afternoon; promenade-concerts in the evening; watching the tables, and putting on a five-franc piece now and again just for fun. The hotels are not dear; you meet the most interesting people—well, I call it just a heavenly place, if you have strength of neck enough to keep back from gambling. And I thank a merciful Providence for having screwed on my head pretty straight.'

'Are you going?'

She laughed.

'Yes—in one of two capacities. If everything comes off all right—well, it won't be quite a fortune for me, for my bet of four thousand to nothing with Joe Cantly will have to come out of it; but it will be a tidy sum; and I shall treat myself to a bit of a spree. Then take it the other way. Supposing that my faithful jock should after all play the rogue, or supposing that Master of Roy should come lumbering along the Carholme Mile at the tail-end of the lot——'

'Oh, what is the use of your talking like that!' he said testily.

She looked at him with a kind of compassionate scorn.

'You haven't got the nerve of a mouse—unless when you're half stupefied with chloroform, or whatever it is you're killing yourself with. Well, I like to face things. I consider myself rather a woman of business, don't you know. And you may be sure that I have made my little dispositions; so that if by some horrible mischance the worst comes to the worst, I shan't be quite dead-broke. Next Wednesday will find me at the Lord Warden Hotel at Dover—I shall have a telegram in the afternoon—if it is not satisfactory—well, I vacate the premises: that's all.'

She glanced at him again.

'What will you do?'

'In that case? I can't think of it!' he said, with haggard eyes. 'I wish these next few days were over. It's maddening work, waiting on and on; and you can't drive the hours a bit faster. It's at night that it's most horrible—I don't believe I ever sleep more than half an hour at a time; and every time I wake it's with a start, and a fancy that some one is in the room bringing some frightful news.'

'And yet you go on taking that beastly stuff!' she said.

'If I didn't, I shouldn't get any sleep at all,' he answered gloomily. 'But this won't last.'

'No, it won't,' she said significantly.

'I mean that after next Wednesday there will be no need of it. I shall pull round after that—get away some-

where—take more exercise, and that kind of thing. It is merely anxiety that has been a little too much for my nerves—there will be no anxiety at Monte Carlo, if I should follow you there—except over a five-franc piece, as you suggest.'

'I wouldn't advise your going much to the tables, even as an onlooker,' she observed.

'Did I risk a single napoleon when I was over there that last time?' he demanded.

'No, probably not; but there were reasons why you should save up every farthing. So you are thinking of coming over to Monte Carlo too? That is, of course, if we pull this thing off successfully. But if not?'

'It's no use talking about that,' he said peevishly.

'Haven't you the courage to face the possibility?' she said, as a sort of taunt.

'You have—because you are perfectly certain that Master of Roy is going to win. You can face twenty dozen possibilities when you don't believe in them. But what is the use of talking about them?'

'They may be hocussing the horse at this very minute,' she said.

'Why, they are taking precautions about him as if he were first favourite for the Derby—it's quite notorious. Part of Charlie Bernard's game, of course; the public are sure of a winner this time, and they are to be led on: 100 to 14—it's swinging odds to have to pay up.'

'Yes, but suppose the backers are bit, after all?' she insisted. 'What will you do then, my poor Freddie? What refuge will you fly to from the wrath to come?'

'It's my last chance in England,' he said, gloomily. 'If it doesn't go right, then I'm off for good. I suppose Jack Russell would pay my passage to Australia.'

'Australia?' she repeated. 'What good would you do there? In Australia they want people who can work.'

Then suddenly she altered her tone.

'Come, come, I won't torment you any more. I only wanted to see how far down into your boots you could get, for you can get farther than any human creature I know. Wake up, man! What's the matter with you? Or what's

the matter with the champagne that you won't touch it? Has it gone flat? Never mind, let's see if we can't find something more to your mind.'

She went to the cellaret in the sideboard, and got out some brandy, and brought over the cigars.

'There,' she said, 'help yourself. And I will make my humble apologies for frightening you. Of course it's all right. Did a jockey ever get such a chance before?—£4000 for riding honest! Of course you'll see Master of Roy come romping in—or rather, you'll hear—for I don't suppose you are going down to Lincoln, are you? And don't imagine that I mean to cross the Channel if it comes off all right—not at once, I mean. Oh no! I'm coming back to London. I want to hear how things are going with Master Charlie. I should like to take a run down to Doncaster, and go driving about, on the chance of seeing the barmaid. Not that I care a pin-point—a barmaid!—he's welcome; and so is she—to all the diamonds she'll ever get out of the South African mines. Don't they want crushers for that work?—she might go out there and use her feet—saving of labour. And if Charlie Bernard can't guess who landed him, he's a bigger fool than I take him to be—and that is something considerable.'

'I wish next Wednesday was come and gone,' Fred Foster said.

She regarded him with rather a contemptuous glance. 'Better go home and sleep till then,' was her curt advice.

'I wish I could,' he said.

And then he rose to go.

'Don't you come to see me again until the race has been run,' said she. 'If it goes all right I will hurry back to town at once—you will find me here. And until then mind you keep a quiet tongue in your head.'

She pressed another cigar on him, and he left—making away for his obscure lodgings in Fetter Lane.

How these intervening days passed he himself probably knew but little. The few companions whom he casually met had got an inkling that he stood to lose or win everything on the issue of the Lincolnshire Handicap; and those of them who had any interest in him hoped that, if he was

backing the favourite, he had taken care to hedge a little, for Charlie Bernard's phenomenal run of luck had of late deserted him in a remarkable manner. And they accepted for what they were worth Foster's assurances that it was only persistent sleeplessness that had driven him to chloral, chlorodyne, morphia, or whatever was the remedy he sought: it was but a temporary aid; as soon as he could get away, he would be all right again. In the meantime he was a pitiable-looking object—pallid, nerveless, apprehensive, bemused, and hollow-cheeked. He was 'keeping himself up,' he said, until he could get away.

The Wednesday came. In the morning papers Master of Roy was still quoted as first favourite; and the prophets were almost unanimous in approving the public fancy. Mrs. Fairservice was certainly confident; for in the simple gaiety of her heart—and without rhyme or reason—she sent him a telegram from Dover: 'Keep up your pecker, old man.' He drank some brandy and smoked hard to make the hours go by.

Long before the hour appointed for the race, he went out and down into the Strand, where he kept aimlessly and feverishly walking to and fro, gazing blankly into shop-windows or reading play-bills at the theatre-doors. But as the time drew near these wanderings were more and more circumscribed; until he hardly went more than a stone's-throw east or west of the window of a certain news agency. A small crowd had already collected there on the pavement, hanging loosely about, and evidently waiting for the news. He kept away from those people as well as he could; though his eyes would incessantly go back to the window, with far more dread than hope, so terribly anxious was he. Then a large white sheet was put up, and a murmur went through the crowd. He walked quickly forward. What was this sound that chilled him to the heart?—'Stagdyke!' said one; and 'Stagdyke!' they seemed all to be repeating.

Another step forward, and the great splashed letters in ink were only too terribly legible—staring him in the face. This was what his burning and throbbing eyes beheld—

LINCOLN HANDICAP.

Stagdyke	1
Rebellion	2
Master of Roy.	3

The small crowd melted away almost immediately; he was left standing on the pavement, bewildered, incapable of movement, not even perceiving that he was in the way of the passers-by. It seemed as if he hardly knew what had befallen him. Then, in a stunned and blind way, he managed to cross the busy thoroughfare, and entered a public-house, where he said he would like to sit down for a moment. They brought him a chair at once; and he had just taken hold of the back of it when a giddiness came over him, and he sank helplessly to the floor.

It was but for a second. The potman helped him to his feet again and brushed the saw-dust from his coat, and Foster seemed to try to pull himself together. He did not sit down. He ordered a bottle of brandy, for which he paid, and then asked them to get him a four-wheeled cab. He gave the cabman his address in Fetter Lane; and in a few minutes was left at the door of his lodgings.

CHAPTER XLVIII

NIGHT FALLS

ABOUT mid-day on the following Saturday, Mr. John Scott called at these lodgings in Fetter Lane, and was admitted by the landlady, who forthwith began her protestations and complaints and entreaties.

'No, I don't want no rent; I want to see him out o' my 'ouse, that's what I want; I have my other lodgers to consider; and every one of us expecting to be burned alive in our beds some night. You said as you was going to take him away yesterday and the day before——'

'I'll get him away as soon as I can,' the big, good-natured-looking man said, taking her remonstrances quite as a matter of course. 'Do you mean to say he has never stirred out?'

'Stirred out? Where do you think he would get the drink, then? And I'd have kep' him out, but I couldn't lock the door against the other lodgers; and would he give up his latch-key?—not he—he's that cunning, for all he doesn't know no more what he's doing than the babe unborn. He was crying yesterday! lor, such a silly; said his mother died this time last year—what do I know about his mother, or care either? I don't believe a word of it—it was all a trying on, to get Polly to go out for some more gin. Well, what I say is this—I'll stand it no longer, and if you don't get him out o' this 'ouse, I'll get in a p'leeceman as will. We don't want to be burned in our beds—and I don't ask for no rent—I want him out o' this 'ouse afore he sets it on fire, that's what I want and mean to have.'

'Very well, very well,' John Scott said suavely. 'I'll get

him away if I can.' And therewith he proceeded to climb the narrow and dusky stairs slowly and cautiously, as became one of his bulk. When he opened the door of the small apartment he found that the blind of the solitary window was down and the gas was burning. Foster lay at full length on the bed, his clothes on, his face downward on his hands. John Scott went forward and touched his shoulder, and then shook him slightly. 'Here, man, wake up! Haven't you come to your senses yet?'

Another shake, and Foster slowly turned and raised his head, and regarded his visitor with dazed, stupefied eyes, that yet had some vague look of terror in them. 'What do you want?' he said in a thick voice.

'Sit up and I'll tell you,' Scott said, and he pulled him up by the shoulders. 'I've been trying these two days to get something hammered into your head, and it hasn't been much use. I wonder if you'll understand now. Do you know that there's a warrant out against you?'

'I don't care,' he said wearily, 'they can take what they like—I've nothing——'

'Bless my soul, can't you understand the difference between a writ and a warrant? It's a warrant, I tell you, and the warrant-officer is on the look-out for you. Don't you know you are wanted for that affair at the American Bar?'

The big Yorkshireman eyed him curiously; but there was no kind of intelligence in the vacuous, hopeless, pallid face. All that Foster said—with a sort of feeble impatience—was, 'What do you want here? What time of the night is it?'

'Time of the night? It's the middle of the day, man! Here, I'll put out the gas—the smell of it is sickening—and let some light into the room.'

He did as he said, Foster following his movements with listless observation.

'What day is it?' he asked, when the dull London light streamed into the room.

'I like that!' the other said. 'Don't know the day of the week! It's Saturday, then.'

'Saturday?' Foster repeated vacantly; and yet he

seemed to be thinking too. 'Then yesterday was the nineteenth?'

'No mistake about that.'

'The nineteenth,' he said absently; and he was staring right before him, and taking no heed of his visitor. 'That was the day I was to start afresh—and I was to go down to Missenden—yesterday, was it?—gone by—gone by.'

John Scott came over to him.

'Look here, Freddie, you've got into trouble, though you don't seem to know it; and I mean to do the best I can for you; but it's no good unless you try to pull yourself together. Do you understand?'

Well, his intelligence seemed to grasp this idea.

'Yes, yes, that's all right,' said he, with incoherent earnestness. 'That's all right. You're a good fellow, Scott. I'm listening. All I want is a drop of something to steady my nerves.'

He rose, and with trembling gait was making for the cupboard when the Yorkshireman interposed his capacious bulk.

'No, you don't. Now that I've caught you in a half-sensible state, you've got to keep so until we decide what has to be done.'

'It's no use, then,' Foster said helplessly. 'I can't listen to you. I feel like death. I wish you'd go away and leave me to myself.'

His visitor hesitated. Perhaps what he said was true.

'Well, one nip,' he said, and stood aside.

Foster went to the cupboard, quickly poured out half a tumblerful of some white fluid and drank it off before the other could interpose. Then he went back to the bed and sat down. It seemed to concern him little now what his visitor had to say.

'That was a stiffish dose, but I hope it will pull you together; you'll have to have your wits about you, unless you want to be laid by the heels,' Scott said. 'So you understand, now, that there is a warrant out against you, and that you'll have to get clear away from London like greased lightning, or you'll be up at Marlborough Street?'

'Oh, what are you talking about?' Foster said peevishly, and yet in an absent way; he did not seem to be paying much attention.

'Upon my soul, I don't believe you know one thing that has occurred during these three days!' John Scott exclaimed. 'Do you mean to say you can't remember what happened on Wednesday night at the American Bar!'

'What American Bar?' he said indifferently.

'At the Palladium. Well, perhaps not. But you seemed to understand yesterday when I was here. I wonder whether you'll understand now—sufficient to make you get up and quit this place. You mean to say, you haven't the least recollection of the whole thing—coming into the American Bar with Jim Deane—quarrelling with him about paying for the drinks—and making such a row that the barman had to interfere?'

'Oh well, I daresay I had a drop. It's all right,' he muttered.

'It isn't all right! I suppose you don't remember catching up the knife the barman had been cutting lemon-peel with—will that bring you to your senses? I don't know—at least, I don't want to be certain—whether you struck him with the knife, or whether he stumbled against it in the scuffle; but anyhow we got you hustled out and into a cab; and Jim Deane had sufficient *nous* to give them your Wellington Street address, when he said you would answer to the charge. Now do you understand?—that there's a warrant out against you—and I suppose the charge is cutting and wounding, or whatever the lawyers call it—and unless you quit out of this place at once, they'll be down on you.'

The warning seemed to make little impression.

'It doesn't matter,' he said listlessly. 'It's all over with me now. I'm done for—they may hang me if they like. The luck's been against me—it's no use trying any longer. I thought I was going to have one more chance; and yesterday was the day—the 19th of March it was my mother died—she was the only one that ever cared for me—and when she died it was all up with me—the 19th of March—that was the day I was going to start afresh—if I had had this one more chance. But the luck's been dead against me.'

'Look here,' said his visitor, roughly, 'instead of

maundering on like that, you'd better wake up and settle where you can hide yourself for a time. Have you any friends abroad? Or where was it you retired to in Yorkshire?'

He did not answer. He was vacantly staring at nothing; and the spirit he had drunk seemed to be rendering him more and more maudlin.

'I meant to have gone down to Missenden,' he continued, in his husky voice, with his head hanging down on his chest. 'I meant to have taken an oath on my mother's grave—if I had got this last chance—and I'd have tried to make up to them for all that's past. Well, it's no use now. The game's played out. It's all over with me.'

'And what do you propose to do, then?' Mr. Scott asked, with obvious sarcasm. 'Sit here till the warrant-officer comes? Then you're up at Marlborough Street. Who's going to become your bail, do you think? Perhaps you consider your own recognisances would be enough? I don't imagine the magistrate would, though. I don't think prison-life would suit you, my lad, in this cold weather; and there would be mighty little unsweetened gin going. Come, come, man, wake up, and clear out of this neighbourhood, to begin with—whatever you do next.'

He pulled him from the bed on to his legs; and Foster obediently began to smooth his ruffled clothes and get ready for departure.

'What am I going to do next?' he said, in the midst of these haphazard preparations. 'What do you think I should do? What is there left me to do? Well, I am not going to tell you. But there's a way of making it up to them. I wish I had done it before, when my mother died; but I thought I had one more chance. Yes, you'll see. My wife was frightened that time I went down. I said, "You're a strong woman, but you're not strong enough for—this."'

'What are you blethering about now?' the blunt Yorkshireman said. 'Come, let's settle where you will go, to begin with, when you leave this house. Wandering about London streets isn't the safest thing for you at present.'

'What o'clock is it?' he asked.

'Just after two.'

'Then I know where I am going,' he said, with a kind of maudlin determination. 'You come up to Holborn with me, and you'll see.'

'Oh, you know, do you? Well, that's a comfort, at any rate.'

Just as they were about to leave, Foster turned and went to the cupboard. His companion caught him by the arm.

'No, not one drop!'

'Oh, let me alone!' Foster said peevishly, and he tried to shake off the hold. 'It's medicine I want.'

'Let me see, then.'

He opened the cupboard and took out a small phial, which he instantly put in his pocket.

'What are you taking medicine for?'

'When I can't get sleep.'

'What? Sleeplessness? Is that what ails you? You've been asleep for three days!'

'It cures other things,' Foster said gloomily. 'Cures everything, for the matter of that.'

'That's something like a medicine, now!' Scott said encouragingly. 'Can it cure impecuniosity?—for that's what most of us are suffering from since Joe Cantly roped Master of Roy—the infernal whelp! Well, they'll stop his playing that little trick again, or I'm mistaken.'

They were getting down the dark staircase by this time. When they got outside, Foster shivered with the cold, and his shaking legs could scarcely carry him along. He seemed rather terrified, too, at the number of faces regarding him; he kept his eyes fixed on the pavement, and answered his companion in monosyllables.

As they were walking along Holborn, Foster suddenly stopped in front of an archway, and held out his hand to his companion.

'Good-bye,' he said, with averted eyes.

'What do you mean?' Scott said.

'I am going down into the country,' he answered; but his maudlin resolve had now dropped into a kind of listlessness.

'Going into a public-house, you mean.'

'There is an omnibus starts from here at three,' he said, without taking any offence.

John Scott glanced through the archway, and saw that in the middle of the courtyard of the old-fashioned inn there was undoubtedly an omnibus standing, though as yet the horses were not put to.

'Oh, I see. The one that goes down into Buckinghamshire? So you are going to your own people down there? Well, now, that's very sensible—the very best thing you can do. You be quiet there for a time, and pick yourself up again; then you'll be able to look round and see what should come next. The very best thing you can do. Good-bye, old chap, and Jim Deane and I will see whether we can't square that blessed barman.'

So they shook hands; and John Scott went on his way; and Foster, with a strangely apprehensive look—as if he feared to meet some familiar face—passed through the courtyard, and entered the taproom, where he sat down in a dusky corner to wait until the omnibus was ready to start.

In due course of time, the handful of passengers—mostly elderly country-folk burdened with innumerable baskets and parcels and packages—who were going by the omnibus were summoned to take their places; and Foster rose and went out too. The first person he saw was the driver—an old and familiar acquaintance of his from boyhood upward. The stout, rubicund, wholesome-looking man seemed much surprised and concerned.

'Lor a mussy, Mr. Fred, how poorly you do look, to be sure. Be you going with us?—ay?—and the box-seat at your will and pleasure; but you'll take a drop of something before ye start, just to keep the cold out, won't ye?'

'I'm going inside,' Foster said, shivering a little; and he got into the vehicle, and went up to the farthermost corner, where he huddled himself together. If any of the other passengers knew who he was, they did not speak; he had not even glanced at them. And presently, no doubt, they thought that the sickly-looking young man in the corner was asleep, for apparently his eyes were closed.

The old omnibus jogged placidly along, away out by Acton and Ealing and Hanwell, stopping now and again to deliver its parcels at the wayside houses. At Uxbridge there was a longer halt; and here Foster got out and went into the tavern, and drank some hot gin and water. He did not, according to usual custom, ask the driver to join him; he went back to his corner, and to his stupefied meditations. The wintry afternoon was darkening now.

They went on by Chalfont St. Peter's and Chalfont St. Giles's. The lamp inside the omnibus had been lighted by this time, and the dull orange glow fell on the sallow and sickly features of the solitary traveller, who seemed to huddle himself away from his fellow-passengers. At Amersham, however, he again got out, and had some more gin; the landlady, to whom he was known, expressing the greatest concern over his altered appearance. Indeed, he seemed scarcely to understand what he was doing; and there was a furtive look about his eyes—dazed as they were—as if he thought he was being watched.

At length, about nine o'clock at night, he arrived at his destination. But he did not go on to his father's house; he alighted at the inn at which the omnibus stopped; and went inside, and asked the people, who knew him very well, for a bedroom for the night.

'Why, Mr. Foster, baint you going on home?' the landlord said, in great astonishment.

'No, I'm not,' he said huskily. 'I don't want to disturb them. I don't want them to know I'm in Missenden—do you understand? I'm going out for a while. Have the bed ready by the time I get back.'

'And about supper, sir?' said the landlady.

'I don't want any. I haven't been very well. It's sleep I want.' And therewith he went out into the dark of the night.

But the landlord, who had known the Foster family for years and years, was sorely disquieted; he did not like the look of the young man's appearance nor his strange manner; and after a hurried consultation with his wife, he put on his hat and went quickly out into the darkness. He could see the way that Foster had taken, and he followed,

keeping a certain distance between him and the black figure ahead. He went down the main thoroughfare of the village; then got away from the houses; and then began to ascend the little hill on which the church is built. Here, away from the yellow light of the windows, one could see better; the stars overhead were clear; there was a crescent moon, too, down in the south; the friendly watcher had no difficulty in following the movements of the young man who had awakened his suspicions, if not his alarm. Then he almost took shame on himself when he saw what happened. Foster, feebly and slowly—for he seemed very weak—went up the steps of the churchyard, clinging to the handrail; he opened the little gate; he went forward—still more slowly, for there were one or two large yew-trees here that made the place dark—and knelt down by a grave. It was his mother's grave. And then the next moment he had flung himself at full length on the slab of stone, with sobs and moans and inarticulate cries, his face buried in his hands. The man who witnessed this terrible outburst of remorse and anguish withdrew hurriedly and stealthily. When he went back to his wife he would say no word. He put aside her questions; but she could see that something unusual had happened to him.

Fred Foster came back to the inn, looking more ghastly than ever; his eyes were sunken, and yet furtively apprehensive; his face was of an ashen gray. He said he would go to his room at once; he asked for two or three candles, in case he should be sleepless; and then he went upstairs and locked himself in.

'Good-night!' he had said to the girl who took the candles up to him; it was his last farewell to the world.

In the morning both the landlord and his wife were anxious to be relieved of the responsibility of having in their house any one who looked so terribly ill—especially as his own home was but a short way off; and the former had some idea of himself going along and informing old Mr. Foster and his daughter-in-law. And then they thought they would wait and see what the young man had to say. They waited in vain. They knocked at his door; there

was no answer. They knocked again, and yet again; the silence that followed was dreadful; then, taking courage, they drove in the door. There was a dark figure lying on the bed; a curious odour in the air; and an empty phial on the dressing-table at the window. This, then, was the end.

And yet a charitable view was taken of the circumstances in which the body of this hapless mortal was found. It was shown that he had been dreadfully ill; that he suffered from sleeplessness; that the object of his coming to Missenden was to visit his mother's grave on the anniversary of her death—or, at least, on the day after that; and it was suggested as probable that the emotion and excitement of such a visit had rendered him wakeful during the night, and that he had taken an overdose of the narcotic he had been using for some time before. So the verdict of the coroner's jury was simply, 'Death by misadventure;' and there was no reason why any one should dispute it; the worthless life had been snuffed out; thereafter—silence.

CHAPTER XLIX

IN DARKNESS

It was more than a year after these occurrences, and it was on the morning of the Private View of the Royal Academy, that Sabina was in London, and in a room in Janie's house, dressing to go out. In fact, she was already dressed; but Janie was an assiduous and officious tire-woman, and would hardly let her beloved Sabie out of her hands. Again she would put straight the bonnet-strings beneath the chin, and adjust the bit of a veil; and then she had to fasten on, under the throat, a little bouquet of violets that had been presented by Mr. Philip.

'I'll show them something,' said Janie.

'Show whom?' her visitor asked.

'The people at the Academy. I suppose there will be Miss ——, and Mrs. ——, and the Swiss-American girl, what's her name? But I'm not afraid—not a bit. Do you know, Sabie, I do believe black suits you better than anything; and that's just a love of a bonnet! And I wish you could see for yourself how perfectly your dress fits—I mean when you walk; no credit to them either; it ought to be easy enough to fit a figure like yours. Oh, there will be plenty of fine gowns there, no doubt; they can always attract attention that way; that's what I was saying to Phil this morning. "They may have as fine dresses as ever they please; but where is the one that will show a figure like our Sabie's?"'

'I thought we were going to see the pictures?' Sabina said innocently.

'Until the afternoon; then it's the people. We'll get

all the stooping and crowding and worrying into corners over and done; and then you'll have nothing to do but see and be seen.'

'For an artist's wife, Janie,' her friend said, 'you don't seem to be going to this Private View in a proper frame of mind.'

'I see a good many pictures in the course of the year,' said Janie, as she stepped back a pace or two so that she could scan Sabina from head to foot. The result of this examination was obviously satisfactory. 'Yes. They may have dresses as stylish as ever they can make them, but I know who will be the most distinguished-looking woman in that crowd. Come along. It's too bad of Phil not to give up one morning; but he's very busy; he'll come along as soon as he can in the afternoon. And mind you, Sabie, you mustn't let any of the people take you away. You're going with us, mind.'

'My dear child, I hardly know a human being in London now! I don't suppose there will be a soul in the place who will remember me.'

'And a good job, too,' said Janie stubbornly, 'for I want you all to myself.'

They got into the hansom that was awaiting them. It was a summer-like morning; even here in London the air was quite sweet and balmy. They had a pleasant drive in by Kensington Gardens and Piccadilly; and eventually reached Burlington House a few minutes after eleven.

As they entered the vestibule, Janie knew that her heart was beating a little more quickly than usual. She had not heard from Walter Lindsay for a very long time; and, indeed, had every reason to believe that he was still abroad; but once or twice the fancy had struck her that perhaps he might in some unexpected way turn up at this Private View. And the very first thing she did on receiving a catalogue from one of the attendants was to turn quickly to the list of exhibitors at the end of the little volume. It had always been Lindsay's custom to send in a water-colour to the Academy exhibition, chiefly for the sake of obtaining admission on Varnishing Day, which is an excellent day for going round the galleries. But to Janie's surprise she

found that this year his name was absent from the list. She said no word, however. She kept her disappointment and her anxious surmises to herself.

They had a good steady two hours' work at the pictures; and then Janie marched her charge into the luncheon-room and secured a couple of seats. For Janie was host now, and gave herself airs in consequence. Sabina was a visitor from the country, who hardly knew the ways of the town; and so she had to be taken about and shown things, and treated when occasion served, and petted always. Janie confessed to herself that she could not understand men. There was her husband, who might have been all that morning going about with the prettiest woman in the place, discussing the pictures with her, and talking to her as much as ever he chose, and who might at this very moment have been seated at this table making merry with them in the modest fashion allowed by the Academy; and instead of that he must needs keep labouring away at his allegorical and hungry virgins. No matter; there was the one faithful soul. She had Sabie all to herself. And she was very happy and very confident: they might produce what striking costumes they chose—she would say, 'Oh, get away with your purchased finery: look at my Beautiful One!'

There came along a tall, good-looking young fellow, whom Sabina seemed to recognise, though she could not recollect where she had seen him. He shook hands with Janie, and bowed to her companion.

'I had the pleasure of meeting you one night at Mr. Lindsay's two or three years ago,' he said, seeing that she looked puzzled; and then she had a vague remembrance of this being a young Associate who made one of a pretty group of lads and lasses gathered round the piano and singing glees.

He turned to Janie.

'By the way, have you heard anything of Walter of late?'

'No, I have not,' she said, reddening a little as she looked up—for she did not mention Lindsay's name before Sabina more than she could help. 'I have only his New

York address; and as he hasn't answered my last letter, I have no idea where he is. I must write again, for there may have been some mistake.'

'I heard the other day—I forgot who it was who told me—that there was something wrong with his eyes.'

'What?' she said, looking up again.

'I hope it is something of no importance,' he said. 'But for a landscape-painter to have his eyes go wrong that's pretty bad luck. It's a serious thing for anybody—but for a landscape-painter——'

Janie looked a little bewildered and frightened.

'Now I remember,' she said, rather breathlessly, 'that the last letter I had from him was written in such a curious way—not like his ordinary handwriting. And it was very short too; whereas he used to write long letters, if he had been silent for some time. Only he did not say a word about anything being wrong with his eyes.'

'Perhaps it is a mistake,' he said. 'These reports do get into circulation and are exaggerated as they are passed along.'

He talked to her a few moments further about various matters, but her eyes were grave and absent. When he left she did not bring up Walter Lindsay's name again. Luncheon over, they returned to the pictures, and to the crowd, that was now sensibly increasing in numbers.

The afternoon passed without incident—excepting that Sabina encountered her father in this slow-moving assemblage. He came along bland, smiling, and loftily gracious, as usual, nodding to this side or that, as he recognised some one sufficiently distinguished to merit so much of notice. Sabina hesitated. They had not met since the time he went down to Witstead. She did not advance towards him; nor did she avoid him; she stood just a little bit withdrawn, so that he could treat her as he chose—passing on without recognition, if so it pleased him. And yet she looked timidly at him.

'Ha!' said he, as if she were some mere ordinary acquaintance. 'How de do? How de do?'

He offered her a couple of fingers; but he scarcely

bestowed a look on her; his glance was far ahead of him, picking out the great of the land, with whom it pleased him to know that he was on such excellent terms. And then he went on again, of course taking no heed of Janie, who was not a distinguished person at all.

Philip Drexel had arrived in due course; and Janie took the first opportunity she could find—Sabina happened to be engaged in conversation with some one who knew her—to say to her husband, and rather anxiously, 'Phil, do you remember the last letter we had from Walter Lindsay?'

'What about it?'

'Do you remember anything peculiar about the handwriting?'

'No.'

'They say there's something wrong with his eyesight,' said Janie, in an undertone.

'Yes I remember his saying his eyes sometimes bothered him a little.'

'Oh, he spoke to you about it?' Janie said, eagerly.

'Yes; I think it was when he was just back from America—there was some talking about sea-voyages, and he spoke of the glare of the water.'

'But it was nothing serious?' she said.

'Oh no; not at all.'

'What a fright I got!' said Janie, half to herself; but at this moment Sabina returned to them, and so no further mention was made of Walter Lindsay.

Now it was for this Private View that Sabina had prolonged her visit; consequently there was but the one more evening for these three to spend together before her return to Buckinghamshire. It was a very enjoyable evening, nevertheless; for the long-talked of tour in Scotland that Philip and his wife had been promising themselves year after year, had now been definitely fixed for the following month; and they had very nearly persuaded Sabina to go with them as their guest; so that now there was nothing for it but to put a big map on the dining-room table, and discuss routes, and indulge in all kinds of imaginary sights and pleasures. Janie's mind ran mostly on mountains

and remote islands set amid lonely seas; her husband was interested more in mediæval architecture, and ruins, and legends, and traditions. And he declared that, wherever else they might go, they must visit the Braes of Yarrow; for he had some notion of stealing a subject out of Hamilton of Bangour's pathetic ballad; and he wanted to see what the neighbourhood was like. It is to be guessed that it was not the youthful lover, in 'his robes, his robes of green,' that was in Mr. Philip's mind; nor yet the cruel slaughter done on Yarrow's banks. These things were hardly in his way: more likely he was thinking of a single female figure, dim and visionary, with a face grown white with grief, and eyes hollow and haunted with despair:

> *'Return, return, O mournful, mournful bride,*
> *Return, and dry thy useless sorrow;*
> *Thy lover heeds nought of thy sighs;*
> *He lies a corpse on the Braes of Yarrow.'*

Then behind this solitary figure a half-suggested landscape —vague and gray and shadowy—a darkened river—the fatal bank where she 'tint her lover, lover dear'—and beyond these the low-lying hills, sombre under the heavy sky, and receding into a mysterious gloom.

'Sabie,' said Janie, the next morning, at the door of the cab, 'make it a definite "Yes!"'

'I cannot; you are really too kind,' was Sabina's answer. 'I should be dreadfully in the way. Two's company; three's none. If it was a run down to Brighton, that might be all right; but a long travelling through Scotland! And then the expense: young married people like you shouldn't dream of such extravagances.'

'Then you deliberately mean to spoil my visit to Scotland?' said Janie.

'What can you mean?'

'You know well enough. It has been promised me all along that when we went to Scotland you should come with me; and what else did I think of? It's not the old abbeys I care for; it's having you with us: And now you deliberately say no. As for the expense—well, if Phil says he can afford it, and easily afford it, I suppose that is

enough? And I never expected to hear you, Sabie, talk as if you were too proud to accept a small kindness from us: it isn't like you to talk like that—as between you and me.'

'You goose, I never said anything of the kind,' Sabie answered her good-naturedly. 'Well, I will think it over. And if I can bring myself to inflict so much trouble on you, then I will go as your maid, and you will let me travel third-class.'

'Yes, I think that would do very well,' Janie said, gravely. 'Only, I am afraid, in that case, Phil would very soon forsake the mistress for the maid. He would be too much in that third-class compartment. Now, Sabie, before you go—a definite "Yes!"'

'Really, I cannot, Janie, dear; but I will let you know—I must see how old Mr. Foster likes it.'

'Within a fortnight you will let me know?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'And then you will at once come up to town, and stay with us for a week, and get your travelling things ready?'

'I am afraid, if I do go, I shall have to do with what I have.'

'Ah, but you'll come up and see, Sabie!' her friend said, beseechingly. 'And we'll go to the Scotch place in Regent Street— Oh, shouldn't I like to see you in a long gray ulster, and a Tam o' Shanter—at Euston Square Station—walking up and down the platform. You would look so comfortable in it; and it would suit your tall figure, too. Sabie, I'm going to give you that for your birthday present.'

'What nonsense! But good-bye, Janie, good-bye—tell the man to look sharp, or I shall miss my train.'

For several days thereafter Janie expected every morning to hear from Missenden; but no message came; and she thought she must write again and urge Sabie to give her consent. However, something now occurred that changed the whole situation of affairs.

One morning she and her husband were seated at breakfast when a letter was brought to her. It was a bulky letter, and addressed in a schoolboy's hand; she had nearly

thrown it into the fireplace, in the irritation naturally begotten by the receipt of a circular. Nevertheless, she mechanically opened the envelope, and glanced at the contents. Presently she turned to the signature: it was 'Walter Lindsay' she saw there, but not in his handwriting.

'Oh, Phil, what's this!' she cried.

She began again at the first page, and read rapidly and breathlessly. Her husband was looking at her with some amazement. Presently he saw her lips begin to quiver; then her eyes filled with tears; then she rose.

'Read it, Phil—I—I can't,' she said, and turned and quickly left the room.

Yet this was no piteous communication that he was asked to glance through; on the contrary, it was written with an abundance of good-humour. Lindsay apologised, to begin with, for not having answered her letter long before; the fact being that it had been forwarded from New York to place after place, until it had finally reached him in the 'Kingdom of Galloway.' Then he went on: 'They say the wounded hare crawls home to die. Well, it is not quite as bad as that with me; but when I tell you that my eyesight has gone from bad to worse so that now all I can tell is the difference betwixt night and day, you will understand that it was but natural I should come back to the old familiar place, where I can imagine my surroundings, if I cannot see them. And really I am very comfortable, and lead a pleasant enough life. The lad who writes these lines to you is a sharp-eyed fellow, with an admirable acquaintance with every bird and beast you may meet on a morning walk; and an eager sportsman too, from firing at rabbits, which he never hits, to guddling trout in the burns; and I am as much interested in his performances as if they were my own. I have myself tried a little fly-fishing, with more or less success; but expect to be more at home in trolling with the phantom-minnow, if I can come across some good-natured fellow who has a salmon loch. Then I have books and newspapers read to me; and there is no lack of tobacco; and then we have long walks round the coast, or up on the hillsides, and my companion tells me how many birds there were in the covey

that got up at our feet, or what kind of ships they are that are passing, and how far he thinks the horizon is off. So you see I have a good excuse for a life of inglorious ease; and I have but little right to complain; things might have been a good deal harder to bear. And as regards the operation they speak of at some future time, I am trying to prepare myself for the worst. This darkness came upon me by slow degrees, so that I got used to it in a measure; and I can look forward to a lifelong continuance of it without much dismay. There were one or two things, in the way of my work, I had thought to have attempted—that is the only reflection that does trouble me a little at times; but I don't know that I should have done any better than I had done before; and what I have done must now speak for itself. For one thing, the critics may now look on me as a dead man; and they always say nicer things about you after you are dead.

'This is a very egotistical letter; but I thought you would like to know exactly how the case stands with me; and if any one should ask about me, you will be able to say that I am not at all given over to black moods of despair. And if you only knew how I long for news of any friends in whom you and I are mutually interested, I am sure that of your kindness you would send me a line. I would have written to you before, to beg that news of you, but have been trying hard to get quite thoroughly accustomed to my position and circumstances, so as to write in a fairly contented way. And I think I am content. I know I shall be more than content when you send me some bit of news. The smallest things told to me are full of interest—that there are yellow marsh-marigolds in the ditch by the roadside—that a hawk is hovering high in the air—that a blue kingfisher has just darted up the stream—or that a small white rabbit is lying asleep in the sun, just outside the parental burrow—all these little things are of the keenest interest, for they are so many messages from the great world of life and light and colour that is all around me, and that I may never see again. So you may imagine what news from friends must be. Did I say that I would have written before, but that I waited until I was quite used to my surround-

ings? Tell Philip that if they should ask about me at the Arts Club, he may say that I am not repining over much.'

These were the pertinent passages; and Janie's husband was just finishing them when she returned to the room, her eyes red with crying.

'He is putting a very brave face on it,' said he. 'But any one can feel there is more than is set down here.'

'Oh, it is terrible—it is terrible,' she said, with a bit of a returning sob. 'Phil, what are you going to do?'

'Well, we shall be in Scotland anyway: don't you think we ought to go and see him?'

'Ah, I thought you would say that!' Janie exclaimed, and there was a soft gleam of pride and gratitude in her tear-filled eyes. 'And then—as for Sabie?'

She hesitated for but a moment; and it was herself who boldly made the answer, 'Well, if Sabie refuses to go to Scotland *now*—she is not the woman I took her for.'

CHAPTER I.

IN THE KINGDOM OF GALLOWAY

JANIE was not long left in doubt.

'If you think he would like it,' Sabina wrote instantly, 'if you think it would be a little break in the monotony of his life or would serve to convince him how much we sympathise with him in his dreadful misfortune, I will go with you, and gladly. How can I ever forget his kindness to me in my darkest hours? And if that can never be repaid, surely the least I can do is to show him that I remember, and am grateful.'

Then there was a bustle of preparation in the house; for Janie's ideas about Scotland and about what was necessary for such a journey were of a vague description; perhaps she would hardly have been surprised if warned to take tinned meats with her in case of their being snowed up in June, or if Philip had been advised to purchase a rifle, on the chance of his getting a shot at a bear. However, Philip's first care was to ascertain that this visit would be agreeable to Walter Lindsay; and accordingly he wrote, saying they were coming round that way, and would like to see him, and might perhaps, if there was a hotel in the neighbourhood, stay for a few days, and give him of their company if he cared for it. He added that Sabina was coming with them.

The answer showed how gratefully this proposal had been received.

'I have made my young friend here read your letter over several times, for it sounded too good to be true; but I am convinced at last; and you may be sure I under-

stand why you think of coming to this out-of-the-way place. And we'll say nothing about a hotel, if you will put up with such accommodation as my poor house affords; and we will try to give you a Scotch welcome. 'It is an interesting neighbourhood; you will be able to plan plenty of excursions; and you needn't be afraid that I shall be a drag on you—I shall be glad enough when you come home in the evening. In the meantime it will be quite an occupation for me to make preparations for your coming; if I can't see what is going on, I shall be no worse off than the modern general who sits in his tent and conducts a battle from the reports sent in to him. I would telegraph for Mrs. Reid, to give us her additional assistance, but her face would remind Sabina of that sad time, so perhaps we shall be better without. By the way, I have once or twice been thinking of writing to you about my house and studio in London. Once upon a time I made a solemn vow never to sell them—because of certain associations. But then I was earning a good income; now that I am earning nothing, it seems a useless piece of extravagance. Probably I shall never be in London again; and, considering this that has happened to me, I think I am entitled to absolution from that vow; so that if you should chance to hear of a likely tenant or purchaser, you might let me know.'

'Never to be in London again?' repeated Janie, when she read the letter. 'Does he think he would be such a trouble to his friends—a drag on them, he says? But he is hopeless because he is alone. When Sabie and you and I are all with him, we will try to cheer him up a little. And—and I hope Sabie will be kind!'

Then Sabina was summoned up from the country, to join in the general and joyful hurry of preparation for departure. But when she saw what Janie considered needful in the way of rugs, ulsters, waterproofs, and the like—and when she discovered that these good people, though far from being abundantly rich, were making no scruple about providing her with all of these—her conscience smote her. The cost of the travelling, too, would be great; why should she become such a burden upon them? The

alternative was that she should go and ask her father for a renewal of the allowance which, he had formally intimated to her, still remained at her disposal. Perhaps, in other circumstances, she would even now have backed out of this proposed holiday, and contentedly gone down home again to Buckinghamshire. But she wanted to go to Scotland—if her going would be taken as a kindness by one who was once kind to her, and was now sorely stricken —and so she put her pride in her pocket, wrote to her father, got an appointment to meet him at the Waldegrave Club, and went there and found him.

There were two well-known politicians passing through the hall while Sabina was standing there, talking to her father, and explaining her position. When they had got into the morning-room, and the glass door had swung behind them, the one said to the other, 'What a remarkably handsome girl that is talking to Anthony Zembra —did you notice her?'

'Why, don't you know who she is?' said the other.

'No.'

'His daughter, that's all.'

'How can that be? I have never seen her at the house?'

'Oh, she's married—or was married—or something,' his companion said indifferently. 'She doesn't live with family number two.'

Meanwhile, Sabina was being lectured in a cold fashion about the consequences of her evil ways. But when it came to the question of money, there was no difficulty. Sir Anthony pointed out to her that it was no wish of his that one of his daughters should be dependent on the bounty of any one; that her allowance was being punctually paid her when she chose to relinquish it, from motives best known to herself; that it was still at her disposal; and that personally he should much prefer that no relation of his was in receipt of charity from any source whatever. For Sir Anthony liked to speak of his own motives, aims, circumstances, and position; and he seldom failed to convey to his interlocutor a sense of how far, far away from that high standard of integrity and prudence and conscien-

tiousness he or she was. Sabina left the Waldegrave Club just a little bit humbled; but at all events she knew that now those kind people who were befriending her would not have to pay for her travelling equipment.

Then there came the joyous morning on which these three found themselves walking up and down the wide-sounding platform of Euston Station. A carriage had been reserved for them; Philip had stuffed it full of newspapers and magazines. And now Sabina (having yielded to Janie's insistence) was clad in an ulster of gray homespun, with a Tam o' Shanter of similar colour, and looked more like a Highland chieftainess than a Kensington-born young woman.

'Take your seats for the North!'

To some folk there is more music in these simple words than ever was put into any song or ballad. But these three travellers were, as a first stage, going no farther than Carlisle; and indeed knew little of what was before them.

'Look here,' said Mr. Philip, taking out his pocket-book as soon as they were through the tunnels and into the clear daylight again; 'I was talking some little while ago to an American, over here for the first time, and he told me that what struck him most in England was the number of interesting things, historical and otherwise, that you find everywhere within a small compass. Go anywhere you like, he said—for a morning stroll—and there's always something. Now I wonder what he would say to this little run between Carlisle and Stranraer. I have been jotting down some of the points while I was ransacking the guidebooks, and really we shall have our work cut out for us before we reach Carnryan Tower. Listen. They begin the minute you cross the border. Gretna Green—well, that's nothing. Kirtle Water—that is where Helen of Kirkconnell was shot in saving the life of her lover——'

'Oh, if you take account of all the imaginary stories——' his wife objected.

'My dear,' said he, 'it isn't an imaginary story. It was a very actual occurrence—as the gentleman who fired the shot found out. The slaying of Burd Helen wasn't at all the end of the incident—a little interview had to take place

between the lover and the murderer—don't you remember?—

'My sword did draw,
Stern was our fight on Kirtleshaw,
I hewed him down in pieces sma',
For her sake that died for me.'

Then what comes next? Dumfries. I don't know how we are ever to get away from Dumfries and its neighbourhood. Of course we must drive out and see Ellisland, Burns's farm; and Friar's Carse, too; then there's Lincluden Abbey; Drumlanrig Castle; Maxwellton Braes—we'll maybe find another Bonnie Annie Laurie tripping over the dew; Craigenputtock, where Thomas the Thunderer prepared his bolts before coming up to London; Sweetheart Abbey, that Devorgilla built in memory of her husband—thirteenth century work that must be; Caerlaverock Castle; Threave Castle; Dundrennan Abbey, where Queen Mary spent her last night in Scotland, after the battle of Langside——'

'Phil,' said his wife to him, 'if you are going to give so much time to these old abbeys and monasteries, what do you say to Sabie and me going on to Carnryan and waiting for you there? Indeed, if you are going to spend so much time on this little bit of Scotland, how are we to know anything of the country generally? I thought we should see something of the lonely islands in the west, and the mountains, and certainly Edinburgh and Melrose; and you wanted to go back by Yarrow—that's away somewhere else——'

'Here's gratitude,' said he, 'for my having crushed twenty pages of guidebook into ten lines. However, we'll make this compact. You bear with as much architecture as you can; and, on my side, when you think a place is not likely to be interesting, I'll cut it out; Sabina to be umpire.'

So that was settled; but both Sabina and Philip knew very well that it was no ignorant lack of interest in historical or poetical associations that had prompted Janie's little protest; it was that she was anxious to show Walter Lindsay

that his friends had not forgotten him in his trouble, but were quick with their sympathy.

That night they stopped at 'Merry Carlisle;' and next morning were up betimes and on the ramparts of the red castle; looking away across the green meadows and the winding Eden towards the pale blue line of the Scotch hills at the horizon. Then they crossed the Border; and guessed at the place where

> *'In my arms Burd Helen dropped,*
> *And died for love of me.'*

They spent two days in and around Dumfries. They went on to Castle-Douglas. They made their way into the famous Kingdom of Galloway that is 'blest with the smell of bog-myrtle and peat.' Finally, in this slow fashion, they rested a night at Newton-Stewart, so as to take the morning train to Stranraer; and there they found awaiting them at the station a waggonette to convey them to Carnryan.

It was a beautiful soft-aired June morning; and the country through which they drove was picturesque enough —with occasional glimpses of the sea; but there is no doubt that the two women-folk were very much preoccupied, not to say anxious and nervous.

'You'd better say nothing at all,' Philip Drexel had advised them. 'It would only be an embarrassment. Clearly he is determined to put a brave face on it; just you talk to him as if nothing had happened.'

'It seems hard, though,' Janie said wistfully, 'that —that he shouldn't know how sorry we are.'

'You can't say anything well,' remarked Mr. Philip, who had a little common sense; 'and what is the use of saying it badly? And don't you think he will understand?'

When at length they arrived at Carnryan they found it a quite modern place (the old tower, as they afterwards discovered, was on a promontory facing the sea). The house was two-storied, wide, and straggling; surrounded by fair meadows and woods; and with a high-walled fruit-garden at some distance away. The French windows, the trimly-kept lawn, and flower-pots, were all very cheerful and

pleasant; if they had been expecting anything of the grim and gray dignity of an ancient Scottish keep, they were speedily disillusionised.

They alighted from the waggonette, and were received by an elderly man-servant and a smart young maid, who informed them that Mr. Lindsay was down in the fruit-garden, but would be forthcoming directly, as he would hear the carriage-wheels. So they did not go into the house; they loitered about the front door, looking at the shrubberies, and the larch-trees, and the beds of forget-me-nots; and at certain small round puff-balls under a distant hedge, which they found out to be white rabbits.

Then Lindsay made his appearance at some way off, walking rather slowly, with his hand resting on the shoulder of a young lad. His tall form was as erect as ever; but his head was bent a little forward, as if he had fallen into a habit of listening intently. When he came still nearer they could see that there was no appearance whatever of his being blind; there was not even a shade over his eyes. But they heard the boy say to him, in an undertone, 'There's a gentleman, sir; and a tall young leddy; and anither ane not so tall.'

He came forward, holding out both his hands.

'I beg your pardon a hundred times,' he said. 'This is hardly a Scotch welcome—I should have been at the door to receive you; but I fancy Sandy has come a good pace, or else I've mistaken the time. And this is you, Philip—and this is you, Janie—then this must be you——'

'Sabina!' she said, with a touch of entreaty: she could not be left out of the little friendly circle.

'I am glad you have brought such fine weather with you,' he said, cheerfully. 'Didn't you think the country looking pretty as you came along?'

'Oh, beautiful—beautiful!' Janie's husband said.

The two women could hardly speak. It was so piteous to hear him talk approvingly of all these summer things around them, and still to be so far away from them: it seemed almost as if he were imprisoned within some living tomb.

'Come into the house, then,' he said, as if he would himself lead the way.

And then he hesitated—and put forward his foot a little, to find where the stone step was; for the young lad had withdrawn a space, to leave his master free to talk to his guests. At this moment it happened that Sabina was next to Lindsay, and could not but see his helplessness.

'Will you take my hand?' she said, and she gently put her fingers on his arm, and guided him into the hall.

It was her right hand that she put on his arm; with the left she was brushing aside the tears that, in spite of herself, rained down her face.

CHAPTER LI

AT CARNRYAN TOWER

JANIE'S keen desire to visit the northern isles and hills, and Edinburgh, and Melrose, and 'the dowie dens o' Yarrow' had apparently gone away from her mind now; she seemed well content with this bit of western Wigtonshire; and indeed they found the neighbourhood exceedingly picturesque and interesting. Of course they insisted on Walter Lindsay accompanying them on all of their excursions; and the attendant who went with them, perched up on the box-seat beside the driver, speedily discovered that his office had become a sinecure. It was 'the tall young leddy' who had supplanted him; devoting herself entirely to Lindsay; and never wearied of telling him of all that was around them as they walked along. She did not need to lead him. Somehow he knew when she was close by. Her voice was a sufficient guide—perhaps an occasional touch of her dress, too. Naturally, when they were stepping into a boat, or passing under the archway of some old ruin, she gave him her hand; but ordinarily they merely walked side by side—her face turned towards his.

They were thus strolling along the shore one morning, she stooping now and again to pick up a shell or a bit of crimson weed, but ever returning to her welcome task of describing the fair world around them; and Janie and her husband were following some little way behind.

'If Walter had only his eyesight for ten minutes!' Janie said, wistfully. 'If he could only see the expression of her face every time she turns to him. There is one thing surely he must notice—that her voice changes when-

ever she speaks to him. Whatever she may be saying to us—whatever nonsense may be going on—the moment she speaks to him it is all gentleness; and you know how soft and kind her voice is when she chooses. That is what I have said for years and years, ever since I have known her; the way to win Sabie's love is through her pity. Walter Lindsay used to be too well off; she never could be brought to care for him. So I suppose it is true that there may be a soul of good in things evil. I daresay if she had not come through that dreadful time of trouble, she would never have got to know what a true friend he is; and I am quite sure, if this misfortune hadn't befallen him, she wouldn't have the sympathy with him she has now. And very little trouble she takes to hide it. If he could only see, for a second, how she watches his face when she's telling him anything—to gather whether he's interested; yes, and the quickness with which she is the first to get him his stick and his hat when we are coming out; and the eagerness with which she listens to him—and her quick approval—ah well, I don't know what may come of it; but apparently Sabie is quite happy whenever she is with him.'

Thus said Janie in her incoherent way; her husband took a more practical view.

'What ought to come of it is clear enough. To make of two broken lives one whole one is the sensible thing.'

'He is too proud to ask her,' Janie said.

'Let her ask him.'

'She can't. Besides, he would refuse to accept such a sacrifice—that is, if he was likely to be permanently blind.'

'Now, look here,' said Mr. Philip. 'That is a subject which we can't speak of to Walter; but you and I may speak of it; and I assure you that his determination to look at the worst side of the possibilities must have grown up when he was living here by himself, and giving way to depression and gloom. Or he may think it right to school himself to face the worst that can happen. Very well; that may be reasonable enough; but you must remember that the chances are really the other way. No doubt, many of the operations are unsuccessful, but the majority of them

are successful; and you know what the doctors said—that everything depended on the general health of the constitution. Well, look at Lindsay. He has never had a touch of gout or rheumatism or anything of the kind all his life long. I say the chances are all in his favour. Of course, the anxiety must be dreadful; and I can understand a man, in a kind of half-despair, saying to himself that he will rather look forward to the worst, so that he may not be wholly crushed if it should happen.'

'I wonder what Sabie thinks,' Janie said, absently. 'I am afraid to ask her. And I suppose, if he were to be permanently blind, it would be too great a sacrifice for her to make? I know, if the positions were reversed, it would not be too great a sacrifice for him to make; he would sacrifice anything, everything, for Sabie's sake. But you don't often meet with a devotion like that. He told me himself—but mind, you must not tell Sabie this—that when it first occurred to him there was something wrong with his eyes, he began to think there would be at least this compensation in being blind, that Sabie would always have the same beauty for him, that he would always think of her as he had first known her. There never has been anything that he would not sacrifice, and willingly and gladly, for her sake. But I don't know about her.'

'You don't know about her?' her husband repeated, staring at her. 'Well, I like that! Oh, of course you want me to argue that she is bound to make the sacrifice? I am not going to say anything of the kind. But this is clear enough—that, if the success of that operation depends considerably on the general health of the patient, our little trip here seems to have done Lindsay a world of good. He is in ever so much better spirits than when we came.'

'That is because Sabie is his constant companion,' was Janie's answer. 'And I must say for her, that when she sets about making much of any one, she does it with a will. There is no mistaking it. I remember, in the old time, mother declaring she was a most horrible flirt because of the way she was "going on" with Walter at his own house one night. But she wasn't "going on." When she wants

to be good to you, as the children say, she certainly can, and she doesn't care who sees it, either.'

'Well, then,' said Mr. Philip, 'it is clear we are not doing Lindsay much harm by keeping him occupied and cheerful; and I have been thinking we might add on two or three days more to our visit. We can't be in the way, for he has nothing to do; and the house is big; and the servants just as obliging and good-natured as they can be. Well, now, I was thinking of Monday next; shall we say Wednesday instead?'

'If you will stay to the end of the week, Phil,' Janie answered, 'I will give up any one of the places I wanted to see—any one you like.'

'The end of the week? Well, we must first ask for an invitation. And then we'll see what Sabina says.'

But Philip Drexel had himself already cut out one portion of their travelling programme—that referring to the Braes of Yarrow. He seemed to have lost interest in the gray and shadowy figure which, in his London dreams, he had pictured as on Yarrow's banks, with a world of mystic gloom around her. For even as the blood of an anæmic person is flushed by fresh air and sunlight and exercise, so Mr. Philip's imagination, under the constant stimulus of historical and legendary scenes and associations—to say nothing of the brisker health begotten of rowing, and climbing, and moorland-tramping—had warmed into colour. Among Lindsay's books he had discovered the ballad of 'Fair Annie'; and he had gradually put away from him the gray phantom of Yarrow's banks for this brighter, if still pensive, figure—that of the forsaken mistress who is bidden to 'lace her in green cleiding' and 'braid her yellow hair' that she may welcome home the bride—

'Fair Annie stood in her bower door,
And lookit ower the land;
And there she saw her ain gude lord
Leading his bride by the hand.

She's drest her sons i' the scarlet red,
Herself i' the dainty green;
And though her cheek looked pale and wan,
She weel might ha' been a queen.'

This was what he was busy with now; and so the visit to Yarrow's haunted stream was discarded, or at least postponed; and there was so much the more time to add on to their lingering in the pleasant Kingdom of Galloway.

When Philip asked Lindsay to keep them on for another week, he winded up his not ineffectual prayer by saying, 'And the best thing you can do at the end of the time is to come along with us. Moping down here won't do you any good. Come with us for a run through Scotland; and then go back to London with us.'

But Lindsay would not hear of it.

'I should be a continued drag on you, and you have plenty to do. Besides, I have grown familiar with this place; I can get about a little, even when Jamie isn't by. Of course I shall have to be in London for a brief time; we shall meet then. In the meanwhile, Phil, my lad, don't talk about your going, there's a good fellow. I don't want even to think of it—until it's over.'

If these days, then, were now numbered, at least they were halcyon days. The visitors had not committed the usual mistake of English folk in going to Scotland just at the very worst time of the year for weather. And how quickly the time passed! In the morning, after breakfast, they all went outside, for the mignonette was sweet in the soft June air; and if Janie and Philip generally strolled off by themselves, Sabina had found out for herself a warm bank at the southern edge of the lawn, where it was pleasant to sit. Thither she brought Lindsay's chair, and the daily batch of newspapers; and she could make a shrewd guess as to what interested him most when she began to read—not the squabbling of Synods and Presbyteries, and not the sham objurgation of party politics, but rather the reports from the salmon-rivers, and accounts of any new picture-exhibition in London. Then the waggonette would come round to the door; the stragglers would be summoned to get ready; and presently they would be driving away along the coast, or up and over the wild moorland country, until, at mid-day, they sought out some sheltered spot for opening the luncheon-basket. The afternoon Mr. Philip usually devoted to desperate attempts

at acquiring the art of fly-fishing—from a boat on a small loch hard by. Sometimes the others accompanied him; and it was very little the two women knew of the imminent peril they were in from the erratic cast of flies, especially when there was a bit of a breeze on behind the fisherman. Lindsay, of course, could not see; and the saturnine Jamie, sitting at the oars, merely sniggered to himself and said nothing; but nevertheless Mr. Philip flogged away with his variegated cast of Zulu, Blue Dun, and Coch-y-bondu; and if he sometimes caught up in his own clothes, or occasionally lodged the Coch-y-bondu in the gunwale of the boat behind him, those were but trifling mishaps; and eventually his patience and resolution were on most occasions rewarded by the capture of a few innocent small things, attracted by the passage of the drop-fly across the surface. Then home to dinner; after which there was smoking, and chatting, and music; sometimes, on these warm-scented June nights, they opened the French windows, and went abroad in the stillness, for there was moonlight now; and it was strange to hear, in the silence, the occasional soft mewing of some distant seagull, or the whistle of a curlew down by the shore.

On the last night of all these nights, Philip proposed that they should walk up to the old tower, to have a last look at the coast, and the silvered sea. All this evening Lindsay had been silent and preoccupied; Sabina had tried her best to cheer him, but without avail; no one had dared to speak of the departure on the morrow; and indeed the restraint on all of them was only too obvious. So this proposal was rather gladly accepted: and when they went out into the hushed night, Janie and her husband led the way, as was their wont, and Sabina followed with Lindsay, her hand just hovering near his arm.

It was a beautiful night; and the farther they climbed the steep ascent, the more they could see of the still, moonlit water, and the successive gray promontories running out away to the south. There was not a sound; even the seabirds were silent now; and the whispering of the ripples along the shore was too faint to reach them here. And Sabina had ceased to try to entertain him; her own heart

was not over light; perhaps she felt there was much to say that she could not say.

When they reached the tower—which was part of the ruins of a stronghold built by the Robert Lindsay who fell at Otterbourne—they found that Philip and Janie had gone inside and were trying to make their way up to the top. Sabina did not choose to follow them; she seated herself on one of the big stones lying all about; and Lindsay remained standing by her side—his fingers just touching her dress near the shoulder, that he should know she was there.

For some little while there was silence; then she said (recurring to her duties for the last time), 'I don't think I ever saw the sea so still. And there is a small steamer right in the way of the moonlight—jet black it is; it is so strange to see it slowly crossing that wide silver pathway. Where will it be going? Over to Ireland?'

He paid no heed to her question; it was not of the sea he was thinking.

'So you are really going away to-morrow?' he said, in rather a low voice.

'Yes,' she answered simply, 'and I have no heart in going.' Then, with an effort, she gathered courage to say what she wished to say. 'You must not imagine that I go willingly. I think I have been of some little service to you. I think you like me to be with you. And I would like to stay if I could. You did not forsake me—in my time of trouble. If I am going, I have no heart in going; believe that.'

The hand that was so near her touched her; it was trembling a little.

'Sabina, you almost make me speak when I had determined to keep silent—and if I could——' But here he paused for a second. 'No, not yet; not as I am now; I cannot. But perhaps hereafter—it may be different; I must wait—and then—if it is different—I will come to you.'

She could not fail to understand.

'You do not trust me,' she said. 'Do you think *that* would make any difference to me?'

He bent down a little; perhaps it was to listen for the least sound of her voice: it was a habit he had got into since his eyesight had left him.

'Sabina, if the worst were to happen—would you still have pity on me?'

For answer she took the hand that was hovering over her shoulder, and held it in both of hers, and kissed it.

'My best and dearest friend,' she said, and there was even a touch of pride in her simple self-surrender, 'I wish to be with you always; but if that were to happen—then more than ever.'

CHAPTER LII

AT A PICTURE SHOW

WALTER LINDSAY neither let nor sold his town house and studio. On all sides he was informed that the most skilful oculists in the world were to be found in London; and when the time was drawing nigh for the operation for cataract to be performed, he repaired thither. Nor did Janie and Philip and Sabina leave him much chance of sinking into a nervous apprehension and gloom. Nearly every evening they went round to his studio, for Sabina was staying with these good friends just then; and Lindsay and they were near neighbours. Sometimes Sabina took to him or sent him flowers. It was a fair exchange.

'O dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
When we sat at the wine,
How we changed the napkins frae our necks?
It's no sae lang sin syne.'

In her time of trouble he had shown her a kindness that she treasured in her inmost heart; and now it was her turn, in a smaller but in no unwilling way, to pay him all kinds of little attentions and send him daily remembrances. They were not undervalued by the recipient of them.

During the week of suspense that followed the operation Janie was terribly anxious; Sabina much less so. Indeed, her apparent or schooled indifference not only surprised Janie, but pained her; and she ventured to remonstrate.

'Even if the worst should happen,' Sabina said calmly, 'I am quite prepared for it; it will not be so very dreadful.'

'Sabie!—have you no regard for his fame as a painter?'

'I have a greater regard for his love,' was the answer (these two being alone together at the time).

'What do you mean, Sabie? Would you rather have him always dependent on you—is that what you mean? It can't be that you imagine, if he were to recover his eyesight, he would care for you any the less, when you know quite well that never in all your life were you looking as pretty as you are now—that can't be it?'

'Janie, don't talk as if my interests should be thought of at all,' Sabina answered. 'Of course, if Walter gets back his sight, that will be a joyful day for all of us. But if it isn't to be so, we will do what we can to make his life pleasant for him; and I for one am not going to be downcast, even at the worst.'

But she was hardly under such good control on the momentous day when the examination was to be made. She and Philip and Janie were all in the house; the doctor was in the room upstairs. It had been hinted to them that, as far as it was possible for medical skill to judge, there was every reason to believe that the operation would prove to have been successful; but notwithstanding that, Janie was very visibly agitated; and Sabina, though holding herself in restraint, seemed to be listening intently, as if for some footfall on the stair, and she started at the smallest sound. Janie, indeed, could not keep still. She went from one place to another. Not a word was spoken by any of them. At last she left the room, and crept noiselessly up the staircase, and hung about the landing. She could hear them speaking within; surely those voices were cheerful enough?

Suddenly the door was opened.

'Good-bye for the present!'

'You'll tell them, doctor?'

'Oh yes: they're waiting below—they won't have left, depend on it.'

Then he shut the door; and the next moment was confronted in the dusk by this poor, timorous, apprehensive, speechless ghost.

'Oh, it's all right,' said he. 'Very satisfactory indeed.'

Janie flew down the steps—how, she could never afterwards understand—and rushed into the room.

'Sabie! Sabie!'

And then her arms were round her friend's neck, and she was kissing her on one cheek and the other cheek again and again and again. It was all the message she could deliver—but it was understood between those two.

A long time after that—last June, indeed—it was announced that on a certain day there would be opened in Bond Street an exhibition of water-colour drawings and sketches, chiefly of the River Shannon; and on the previous Saturday there was a Private View, at which a large number of the artist's friends were assembled. It was a goodly display, considering that most of the series had been produced within eighteen months—though some of the drawings were of an earlier date. It was one of these older ones that seemed to have caught the fancy of a noble and gracious lady who would insist on Lindsay going round the room with her; and so profuse were her praises that, in order to get away from them, he said,—'Yes, I like that one myself—for it was just underneath those trees that I caught a twenty-eight pound salmon.'

'Really, now!' said this good lady. 'How very interesting! Twenty-eight pounds—that must have been a large fish. What did you do with it?'

'I sent it to Sabina Zembra.'

'Sabina Zembra?' she said inquiringly. 'Who is that?'

'Don't you know? There she is—over in that corner—talking to the little old gentleman with the ear-trumpet,' said Lindsay, looking towards a tall young woman in a dress of silver-gray plush, with a beefeater's hat of the same material, and with one deep crimson rose at her breast.

'But that is your wife!' said this noble person, peering through her eyeglasses. 'Ah, I see—that was her name, was it? What a very extraordinary present to send a young lady!'

'What else could I send her—from the Shannon?' he asked.

At this moment Janie came along.

'It's all right,' she said, in an undertone; 'Phil has been

down to some place in Piccadilly, and got a room where we shall be by ourselves. Sabie and I will follow whenever we see you going to the door. And Phil is waiting outside.'

The consequence of this manœuvre was that, a few minutes thereafter, these four were seated at lunch in a private room of a well-known restaurant; and they seemed rather glad of this respite from their public duties.

'When I first thought of having an exhibition of this kind,' Lindsay said, 'my wildest hope was that that young woman there would condescend to come to the Private View. I little expected to see her mistress of the show.'

'I assure you that it is remarkably nice,' Sabina said. 'You've no idea what pretty things have been said to me this morning. And do you think I was going to make any protest? That wouldn't have been business-like. I felt far more inclined to say, "Good gentleman, or pretty lady, your opinion is quite correct; and will you buy?"'

'You mercenary wretch! However, we've little cause to complain on that score; and I mean to make our holiday this year a thoroughgoing one. I suppose you have got everything ready for Monday morning, Philip—rods and nets and everything?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'Oh,' continued Lindsay, 'I heard a pretty story about you the last time I had to run down to Wigtonshire. The boy Jamie says that when you were fishing from the boat you were continually catching up on the gunwale behind you. Now how did you manage that? You must have doubled the flies right behind. And do you know you were whisking them past people's faces?'

'Can the boy Jamie use a rod himself?' Mr. Philip asked.

'Oh yes, Jamie can throw a fly.'

'Then perhaps it would have been better for the young ruffian to have given me some advice instead of treasuring up a tale about it.'

'Never mind, we'll show you how to lift your line behind you when we're all back in Galloway again. Yes, and there's some nobler sport for you, my lad, when we go

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